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Undergraduate Student Activism and Contemporary Social Issues: Understanding College Students' Civic Engagement

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Undergraduate Student Activism and Contemporary Social Issues: Understanding College Students' Civic Engagement

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We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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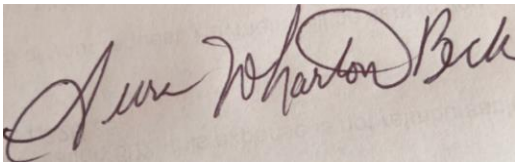

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate college student activism has remained the essence and an integral part of intellectual development process in higher education since the inception of higher education institutions in the United States (Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Ellsworth & Burns, 1970/2009). Historically, students protested bad living conditions on their campuses and revolted for more freedom from the prevailing religious orthodoxy of the time (Ellsworth & Burns, 1970/2009). The historic relationship between college and student activism, though differently expressed throughout these years, revolved around mobilization of progressive forces for the purpose of seeking transformative changes in society. Through time, college students have become more politicized by the overall socio-economic and political power relations within the society outside of their campuses (Crossley, 2008). Literature reviews and scholarly publications around undergraduate college student activism in social justice leadership indicate the continuum that college students have embarked on changing the social disequilibrium as of their inquisitive and critical assessment of the social predicaments (Dominguez, 2009; Green, 2016). Although, organizing on higher education premises for social justice had been addressed, racial justice activism and the predicaments of the marginalized was not so distinctively addressed up until the 1960s Civils Rights era movements.

Therefore, this phenomenological case study intended to explore what informed undergraduate college student activism, particularly on the issue of racial justice by citing the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement with a localized grassroot network tasked with building local power to lead resistance movements against the violence inflicted on Black citizens. An array of issues ranging from how higher education professionals cope with student protests on campus and the theoretical approaches identified and discussed key elements of college student

intellectual development through civic engagement. The fact that college activism has been becoming an alternative platform of political engagement to the traditional party politics for undergraduate college students and students' intellectual development in social justice leadership coupled with the changing dynamics of organizing on campus as a result of the cyber media platform demands more research for so that higher education professionals could have adequate awareness and a positive grip on the matters pertaining to student civic engagement.
Keywords: *College, student, activism, protests, Higher education, social justice, social movements, leadership, BLM, racial justice, allyship, intellectual development. Politicizing effects.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An event of national significance in the social justice movement was triggered by the killing of a 32-year-old African American man, Philando Castile, on July 6, 2016 in Falcon Heights, Minnesota by a St. Anthony, Minnesota police officer (Minnesota Public Radio [MPR], 2016). As part of an alleged series of police brutality and racial profiling against African American men in particular, the shooting achieved a high profile from a live-streamed video on social media recorded by the victim's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds. The incident sparked months of outrage and rallies demanding justice for Castile (see Appendix 1). The movement has become part of an ongoing national effort organized by local activists against violence and systematic racial profiling (Chama, 2019; Joseph, 2017).

Before the July 6, 2016 incident in Falcon Heights, an international activist movement with the use of a hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter (BLM), originated in African American communities across the United States to campaign against violence and systemic racism towards Black people (Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagan, 2016; Hailu & Sarubbi, 2019). The BLM movement began in 2013 as a social media campaign after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of an African American teen named Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012 (Banks, 2018). Black Lives Matter became a nationally recognized movement with local chapters for its street demonstrations and rallies in the course of 2014 and 2015, following the deaths of two African American men, Michael Brown Jr. and Eric Garner, in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City, respectively. These two deaths followed a similar pattern due to racial bias and profiling in policing leading to the calamities occurring in all these instances (Banks, 2018; Lewis-McCoy, 2018).

The particular event in Falcon Heights, Minnesota became an integral part of the BLM movement, attracting young college students who served as local organizers on college campuses and communities in their vicinities (MPR, 2016). By calling for Black Lives to matter as a rallying decree and by localizing its national and international network, the BLM movement has practically envisaged a new approach for organizing in the realm of student activism (Hailu & Sarubbi, 2019). Founded by three women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, as a grassroot based local movement, BLM attained an international stature in a short time (Sybrina, 2020). On July 13, 2016 protesters blocked five lanes of the southbound Interstate 35W during the morning rush hour in Minneapolis. Elements of student activism on matters pertaining to protest and issues regarding the treatment of African American people served as a tool to link the aspirations of young college students and their social justice ideals. They joined the attempt to call on a broader network of sympathizers of human rights to change the oppressive state of affairs embodied in the BLM movement.

My study involved undergraduate college students who engaged in activism on and off campus related to the BLM movement following the death of Philando Castile. I sought to describe how student activists framed their demands and fought for change for the social ills by altering the prevailing status quo. I also wished to learn how the activism affected their development as college students, activists, and leaders for social justice.

Student Activism as a Vehicle for Change

This topic was of interest to me because college campuses have been, historically, centers of gravity for student activism (Lynch, 2010; Van Dyke, 1998), and activism certainly affected the educational experiences and outcomes of college students. Growing up under totalitarian regimes in my home country, Ethiopia, allowed me to see how a small number of vocal college

students learning at the very few higher education institutions in the capital including few urban centers, played a leading role in demanding change in the country. Student activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, known as the Ethiopian student movement, contributed to the downfall of the then Emperor of Ethiopia, along with its imperial system of domination (Ottaway & Ottaway, 1978). In fact, the student movement and campus activism were also very rampant across campuses throughout the Western world in the 1960s and 1970s too. Solidarity with the Civil Rights movement and the movements in protest the Vietnam War in the United States attracted large student protests (Altbach & Cohen, 1990). Some other movements in the 1960s in Western Europe attracted many young college students from across the globe as an inspiration for student activism around the world as well (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Barlow, 1991; Van Dyke, 1998).

Student movements also had footprints in some of the totalitarian Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe as well as some Southeast Asian countries despite the gruesome iron grip on power by the communists in these parts of the world (New Republic, 1956). I vividly remember the historic massacre at the Tiananmen Square in China in which hundreds of Chinese students were brutally murdered for demanding change in 1989 (Crane, 1994). The idea of organizing for social change that led to this incident, certainly, started on college campuses at Chinese higher education institutions. Many more examples of similar student activism could be cited in that context. Clearly, student activism has the potential to change nations and the world. In the next section, I provide a rationale for my study and describe how my research adds to the knowledge of college student development in higher education.

Statement of the Problem, Purpose, and Significance

My study concerned the actions and relationships between student activists and the college community as part of the students' development process in the context of student engagement on and off campus. Because higher education institutions' visions and missions involve nurturing young adult learners to become ethically and morally responsible future leaders in their communities as the core of the college learning strategy (Gardner, 2009; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Ivester, 2013), this study addressed an important issue in higher education. The overarching problem statement of my study was clearly anchored in my dissertation topic: "understanding undergraduate college students' civic engagement." I focused on student activism as the central theme of my research study.

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to investigate and analyze what, how, and why undergraduate college students participated in social justice activism and civic engagement related to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement largely in the cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and surrounding suburbs during a four-year period, beginning in the 2016/17 school year and ending in 2020. This study involved student activism and student development, and placed activism on campus and the wider context of community. The context and setting for my study focused on a particular event as a case in point. This in-depth study reveals how college students in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area rallied around an incident that occurred in Falcon Heights, Minnesota in 2016 and engaged in racial justice advocacy. Specifically, the event under discussion involved both the dynamic of race relations and community and police relations. The incident which sparked student discontent and protest involved a series of events

leading to student activism in the protest. I provide the background involving student protest injustice next.

College campuses may serve as a platform for organizing student activists and provide a spatial setting where their activism may be expressed (Levine & Hirsch, 1991; Van Dyke, 1998). Student activism may be conceived on campus grounds to address off campus social justice causes, including their manifestation in the wider community. The location of student activism may take different forms based on student decisions and choices; however, their participation and its effect on them carry over to their college experience.

In essence, organizing may take place on campus premises because it may be the primary scene where students who share similar values get to know each other and respond to a call to action (Crossley, 2016). Sometimes, student actions to protest targeted social ills perceived as unjust may occur outside of the campus within the wider community (Crossley, 2016; Green, 2016). Since the process of organizing occurs on campus and the actions of protesting may take place outside of the campus, the activism—both on and off campus—may be intertwined in shaping student activism as a phenomenon. Social activism is a strategically guided action in social justice leadership with a defined goal of bringing about policy changes in the society; an activist is anyone with a resolve to fight for such changes (Barnhardt, 2012; Crane, 1994; Crossley, 2008). Student activism expresses collective student behavior to rally around a certain social issue (Jacoby, 2017).

An analysis of student activism that organizes itself on campus and rallies for off-campus social justice movement is explained by well-founded theoretical and methodological constructs (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Crossley, 2008; Van Dyke, 1998). In this effort, the analysis should contribute to a more nuanced and stronger conceptualization of the following topics, including:

(1) how students describe their engagement beginning with consciousness about an issue and extending to various protest actions; (2) the response of campus leaders to their involvement in social justice campaigns; (3) the students' experiences on college campuses, including their interaction with others and their perceptions of the degree of support the college provided them; and (4) student reflections on their activism, including their relationships with like-minded activists and those not involved in the movement.

In interviews with participants, focused on the process of the participants' informed decision to be involved in BLM, because it is quite apparent that BLM is a movement for racial justice born out of a series of incidents (Sybrina, 2020). The debate around the idea that Black Lives should matter has been raging for a longer period of time going as far back as the 19th century (Anderson & Span, 2016; Banks, 2018). In this particular study, I was interested in the students' experiences and their development while engaged in social justice work. I hoped to trace what informed student activism about a particular social justice cause and the relationship between student activism and college leadership. The growing number of the student population on campuses, coupled with more complex social issues of our time, may create larger rallies reminiscent of the Vietnam War era or the Civil Rights movement. This call to action may give way to piecemeal agendas around which undergraduate students on certain local campuses may congregate and call for solidarity across the spectrum as needed. The need for allies and the way social justice issues are shaped on campus grounds must be understood by student affairs, including the staff, faculty, administration, and the college community in general.

Almost as old as the beginning of higher education, student activism has remained an integral part of the student mobilization to bring about policy or system changes in political, environmental, economic, and social spheres (Jordan, 2002). According to Jordan (2002),

activism extends beyond event driven activities, such as protests and voting. In essence, it is an effort by individual students or groups of students who "desire, demand, and work for change" (p. 12).

Even though the scope varies, student movements, activism, and protest are intertwined. Activism begins with becoming involved in rallies (Barnhardt, 2012), participating in discourse for certain causes (Biddix, 2014), and eventually strategizing the goals and actions (Macdonald & Young, 2018). The distinction between becoming involved, participating, and becoming an activist is linear with increasing levels of responsibility in a hierarchy of potential responses and actions (Biddix, 2014; Macdonald & Young, 2018).

Before the concept of student activism was introduced to the lexicon of social activism in general, student movements were the precursor of today's activism (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). The earliest student movements were viewed as an expression of student protests against the actions of their professors or college living conditions ranging from housing, dining, and accommodations needed in the higher education setting (Morrison, 1936). The history of student movements is as old as the history of the first higher education institutions. The initial campus-based student movements evolved through time, attracting college students to become involved in activities that demanded political, social, economic, and environmental policy changes in society (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009).

Protest movements historically started as campus-centered protest and later evolved to off-campus engagements (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). This shift to off-campus engagement represents an evolving form of the student activism known today. Student activism, as recently as this decade, has evolved in form and content, while the underlying philosophy of demanding change has remained the same (Barnhardt, 2012; Crossley, 2008).

Students participate in on campus and off campus causes that align with their ideological commitment for seeking justice (Van Dyke, 1998). Today's news reports and publications attest to the method of staging sit-ins on campuses as a particular instrument of protesting policies, such as state governments' legislative policy enacted to cut higher education funds (Glenn, 2015). Historically, student movements played vital roles in fostering social changes, both nationally and internationally (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Wilson & Curnow, 2012). For example, rallies around the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war fervor in the 1960s played vital roles in policy changes (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Barlow, 1991). Similarly, college students staged protests dictatorial regimes around the world and challenged poor working conditions and people suffering from impoverished lives.

Student civic engagement in the form of protests, rebellion, movements, and ultimately activism is not a new phenomenon in higher education institutions (Broadhurst, 2014; Levine & Hirsch, 1991). Due to the ever-increasing student population and diversity on college campuses as well as the complexity of social issues through time, the study of student activism and social justice work is imperative in higher education communities. Because the traditional-aged undergraduate students engage in student activism during their formative years, it is equally important for parents, professionals of student affairs or college professors, and the community in general to understand how students get involved, why they get involved, and what motivates them to get involved.

Significance

Higher education administrators and faculty should appreciate the social context in which student activism takes place and how it varies based on changes in the community. This study may be of vital interest for the college community to both understand student activism as

an integral part of student development as well as perhaps serving as the beginning of students' ethically and morally responsible involvement in social justice leadership (Barnhardt, 2012). A misunderstanding regarding the nature of student activism on campus may adversely affect administrative decisions and lead to confusion and/or tensions occurring both on campus and in the community as well.

An increasing number of researchers have reaffirmed that college grounds potentially provide young undergraduate students with a platform to become involved in civic engagement regarding social and political issues in communities around them beyond their college campuses (Crossley, 2008; Lynch, 2010; Van Dyke, 1998). A study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA indicated increased interest in social activism by first-year college students (Green, 2016). Although the philosophy of nurturing ethically and morally responsible future leaders remained the bedrock of the mission statements of several higher education institutions, there is not enough emphasis on how colleges support or encourage student activism as part of the service-learning education strategy and the curriculum (Stepteau-Watson, 2012). Education may create an awareness that, in turn, evokes the need for engagement in issues that matter to the community.

There appears to be a gap in the literature regarding the degree of support provided to emerging young leaders assuming their roles as student activists (Cole & Harper; Jacoby, 2017; Kezar, 2010). The need for allies and the way social justice issues are shaped on campus grounds must be understood by student affairs, the staff, the faculty, and the college community in general. As an aspiring candidate for a role in the field of higher education and someone with keen interest in the empirical study of student activism on college campuses, I explored how

college students inform themselves about social justice issues and reach out to like-minded allies beyond race and gender on a particular issue of significance.

The findings of my research study may prove valuable to the understandings of undergraduate students' rationale for getting involved in or becoming activists as a dynamic in their cognitive development. Understanding the dynamic under discussion fosters the relationship between students and college administration, promotes a positive policy making practices, and ultimately, reduces worries that parents may have regarding their children's intellectual development.

Research Question

I adopted the following question to conduct my study of college student activism: How do undergraduate college student activists experience and make meaning of their participation in the Black Lives Matter movement over a four-year period following the death of Philando Castile? Student activism was usually triggered by incidents of police violence occurring in the community coupled with the prevailing experiences of a continuing pattern of racial injustice. Student activists and others demanded justice for Philando Castile as well as other young African American victims of alleged police and/or racial violence during this period. In other words, the research question presented an inquisitive investigation of the phenomenological dynamic regarding what informed the triggers for undergraduate college student activism for social justice.

Definition of Terms

Activism: a strategic act of advocacy with the intent of impeding, promoting, or intervening in social, political, economic, and environmental policies to make changes in the society for the better (Barnhardt, 2012).

Ally: an individual or a group who aligns with and supports a cause with another individual or group of people. Allyship is basically an act of rendering support by members of the dominant social group by working alongside the marginalized members of a social group to end a discriminatory system of oppression (Briodo, 2000; Edwards, 2006)

Black Lives Matter: a movement evolved in Black-led organizations whose mission is to build local power and intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the State that is customarily explained in terms of police brutality (Black Lives Matter [BLM], n.d.).

Civic engagement: working to make a difference in the civic life of communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes (Barnhardt, 2012).

LatinX: a gender-neutral designation, used instead of Latino or Latina to refer to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity in the United States.

Movement: a comprehensive designation given to the ideas and activities of student groups involved in social protest. In the context of this study, student movement is understood as a phenomenon that extends over a longer period of time and transcends different eras of generations of students (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009).

Protest: an expression of bearing witness on behalf of and express cause by way of peaceful or coercive means to change undesired policies or situations (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009).

Rebellion: an act of resistance by refusing to obey the orders of an established authority and a disapproval of the prevailing situation or the status quo leading to demanding change through insurrection or uprising (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My study concerned how college students inform themselves about off campus social issues in the community deemed unjust and how they became involved in demanding social change. Additionally, I inquired about the dynamics of how students organize for such missions to uncover topics associated with both on campus organizing and off campus engagements. Contemporary student activism is not just limited to college campuses but also involves off campus actions, such as protest, to seek the desired change.

I adopted the following search terms to conduct my study: “student activism,” “social movements,” “racism,” “racial equality,” “college student,” “undergraduate,” “Black lives matter,” and “social justice.” Using these terms, I selected literature from scholarly articles and journals, accessing the following databases: Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, ERIC, and Google Scholar. I reviewed over 75 articles and found peer-reviewed scholarly articles on student activism and minority/marginalized students’ experiences and contemporary social issues. I examined the issues which attracted the attention of marginalized students during their undergraduate years.

I structured my findings based on the definition and essence of student activism on the college campus as well as engagement in the wider community with BLM as a case in point. I organized my review findings into the following themes: (1) brief history of student activism; (2) contemporary student activism; (3) instances of contemporary racist incidents on college campuses; (4) student activism and political participation; (5) social issues and the off-campus community; (6) BLM student activism in the context of racial justice; and (7) higher education administrators and college student civic engagement.

Student activists engaged in a socially responsible civic discourse aimed at influencing political, environmental, economic, or social changes throughout history (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Crossley, 2008). Non-traditional political mobilization originally focused on the schools' administrative policies, curriculum, and educational funding, providing student groups with the foundation and history to further influence the greater political events in their contemporary societies, both on and off campuses (Dominguez, 2009).

College campuses served as the first platforms for undergraduate students to exercise personal freedom away from parents for the first time (Biddix, 2014). Students explored social issues, learned how to participate in a rally for a cause that could promote the common good and ultimately developed self-confidence in their formative years as the future socially responsible leaders in the society (Biddix, 2014). As a prelude to understanding the terrain of student activism and the respective social issues that mobilized student activists around those causes, it is important to decipher the different historical context. Student movements served as an integral part of the overall social movements for socio-political and economic justice in the United States (Broadhurst, 2014; Rhoads, 2016). I next present a brief summary of the historical origins and the important milestones in the history of America's student activism in the context of the prevalent social issues of the time.

The Chronicles of Student Activism

A brief history of student activism begins with the types of causes supported by students as well as their methods of "rebellion." Student activism began as a mechanism to protest or oppose or change the poor living conditions and maltreatment of students by college administration (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). The need for collective action and networking of

students to advocate for a common cause on campus and in communities beyond the campus characterized America's college campuses since their inception to this date (Crossley, 2008).

The early days of student activism in the United States, also known as student mobilization and protest, go back to the 1600s with the first model of American higher education (i.e., Harvard in 1638, to be exact; Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). Students expressed their dissatisfaction over the behaviors of the president, then known as master, and the conditions of their dining supply and quality. Based on the historical accounts chronicled at the time, the situation escalated into a dissatisfaction due to the president's physical violence against students in the guise of corporal punishment and the spoiled food students were provided in the dining halls (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009).

More than a century later, a recorded rebellion, also known as the Bad Butter Rebellion, over the quality of food broke out in the commons at Harvard in 1776 (Ellsworth & Burns, 1997). Although the rioters symbolically demanded a better quality of dining, the underlying cause of the riot developed into political demands signifying the beginning of student activism over off campus issues. Student activism, also known as a "rebellion," back then, became rampant in the first half of the 19th century (Rudy, 1996). The rebelling students of that revolutionary era echoed demands of national politics; among which the anti-British and anti-Stamp Act throughout the colonial colleges were the most widespread agendas.

Student protests in the first half of the 19th century were marked by frustrations directed against the perceived and real restrictive religious orthodoxy and philosophies regarding the idea of freedom (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). The disputes around the idea of freedom involved deism, atheism, and irreligion as opposed to the traditional theological orientation of most colleges at the time (Rudolph, 1990). The students protested not only ideas but also restrictive practices. The

college administration's conventional notion was that students were misinformed with a false notion of liberty and freedom (Ellsworth & Burns, 1997; Rudolph, 1990).

The advent of the Civil War and national issues, such as anti-slavery in the wake of the abolitionist movement as well as other political concerns dominated protest agendas during the second half of the 19th century (Rudy, 1996). The combination of demands for change in local and national politics were highlighted on campuses and directed against the college administration and faculty. This history of student protests marked the beginning of a comprehensive social justice campaign as we know it today (Rudy, 1996). Students asserted themselves around their own personal freedom while away from their parents. They resisted the approaches of the colleges' attempt to impose strict behavioral and moral codes that college students considered an invasion of privacy (Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Wood, 1974).

The dynamics of the student rebellion rapidly changed from protests to revolutionary fervor due to changes in society in the first half of the 20th century (Broadhurst, 2014). This included the overall transformation of the societal structure, the emergence of business oriented larger universities, increasing number of student population, and confusion over the emerging international relations of the post WWI events stemming from the treaty of Versailles (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). A brief silence in protest occurred sometime in the 1950s (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Levine & Hirsch, 1991). The beginning of the second half of the 20th century introduced a new dimension into student mobilization ignited by the Civil Rights marches and the Vietnam War (Ahmad, 1978). The evolution of student activism went through a series of hierarchical paths, beginning with local issues (mainly conditions on the campus and some community issues in the vicinity of such campuses) and later attained national and international significance in scope (Broadhurst, 2014). For example, students protested the working conditions in some of the

apparel industries both locally and nationally. Students also protested the neoliberal economic policies in the era of globalization related to free trade principles in the arena of the unfair international trade practices (Dominguez, 2009; Mandle, 2000; Wilson & Curnow, 2013)

The study of student activism in higher education was mainly concerned with the explanation of how individual students engaged in activism and how they were predisposed to causes leading them to participate in the type of activism under discussion (Barnhardt, 2012). As student activism began to embrace a wide range of issues involving politics and society, students developed divergent views, which, in turn, resulted into the emergence of different student groups as a way of addressing such diversified needs (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). These differences included racial, ideological, political, and class categories as a way of mobilizing to tackle issues each group deemed dear to them at the time.

An important milestone in the arena of racial justice, for example, involved the formation of Black student groups with the idea of Black power originating from the "Negro religious movement" initiated in Detroit in 1931 as its ideological precursor (Arthur, 1969; Rosenthal, 1975). Since the 1960s, Black student organizations focused their movements around local autonomy and the controversy of winning allies across the racial spectrum (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). The 1970s witnessed increasing Black college student protests at some of the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) demanding equal rights (Nnorom, 2017). In its edition on May 15, 1978, the *Washington Post* reported that for nearly five days, a very large number of Howard University students, led by members of the senior class, took over the university's administration building and halted the oldest predominantly Black university in America (Trescott & Hendrickson, 1978). The focus of my research, namely, the role of student activism in the contemporary "#BlackLivesMatter" (BLM) movement of this decade, was characterized

by a new dimension of social media-driven activism with a trademark known as the hashtag, "#BlackLivesMatter" (Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagan, 2016).

Contemporary Student Activism

Student activism as a means of advocacy for a just society and as a way of resistance to repressive government policies is predominantly used by members of marginalized groups in American society with people of color ranking at the top of the pyramid (Hope et al., 2016). Undergraduate college students of color and other minority groups, such as LatinX students, tend to get involved in activism during their early college years. Their activism lasts through the end of their undergraduate tenure on college campuses. Participation in Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) rallies attracted substantial number of undergraduate college students of color and a sizable number of LatinX students respectively (Hope et al., 2016).

The experiences of marginalization that left out the African American youth from the mainstream political process is rooted in the history of slavery and segregation (Ahmad, 1978; Anderson & Span, 2016; Hope et al., 2016; Rogers, 2011). Segregation negatively impacted the overall participation of the African American community in the traditional political process. For example, African Americans have less trust in the efficacy of the traditional processes, such as going out to vote or reaching out to their congress representatives or senators (Jones & Reddick, 2017). As a result, African Americans resort to activism as an alternative to demand change through protests or boycotts (Hope et al., 2016). Even though explicit racism and racial discrimination is not allowed under the law, minorities suffer implicit discriminatory practices known as micro-aggression (Hope et al., 2016; Patterson & Domenech Rodriguez, 2019). Student activism represents an alternative to the traditional process of voting or reaching out to

their representatives to influence political decision (Broadhurst, 2014; Crossley, 2008). Instead, student activism has emerged a more feasible means of struggle to attain social justice.

A Brief History of the Black Lives Matter Movement in Perspective

The exact origin of the BLM movement is not clearly dated but as part of America's Civil Rights movement and the history of Black freedom movement (Chase, 2018). Black Lives Matter, as a concept, has its origin in the Civil Rights era. Further, BLM was conceived as part of a Human Rights movement with the goal of seeking the full recognition of Blacks as citizens (Ahmad, 1978; Barlow, 1991; Rosenthal, 1975). The purpose of the BLM movement is to fight for full civil, social, political, legal, economic, and cultural rights as enshrined in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2018). The racial connotation of the movement as the name indicates emphasized the Human Rights concept—including the idea all lives matter—even though it was the Black community who were explicitly subjected to discrimination and disenfranchisement as a society (Bradley, 2003; Rhoads, 2016; Turner, 1998).

While the historical narrative of the movement goes back to America's history of racial inequality, BLM has two phases, namely the Quarter Back Black Freedom Movement and the contemporary #hashtag movement (Chase, 2018; Cumberbatch, & Trujillo-Pagan, 2016; Raynolds & Mayweather, 2017). The current social media aided #hashtag phase of the BLM has a recoded date and chronological explanations of events. Chase (2018) made historical comparisons of people's reactions to court decisions regarding matters of racial justice as a blueprint for the origin of BLM then and now. Chase, additionally, explained the evolution the movement for racial justice by comparing and contrasting the quarter back era (that refers the Civil Rights era protests) and the BLM movement. In essence, the timeframe goes as far back as the days following the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) verdict, the birth of the recent

#Hashtag era BLM, and continuing through the days after the verdict in the very recent *State of Florida v. George Michael Zimmerman* (2013 case (Chase, 2018).

On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a local resident and member of the neighborhood watch, shot Trayvon Martin to death (Botelho, 2012). Martin was a 17-year-old African American man who was visiting his father in Sanford, Florida. The shooter, Zimmerman, was acquitted in a trial. His acquittal triggered a social media campaign by a group of activists leading up to the birth of the most recent BLM movement in 2013 (Chama, 2019; Chase, 2018; Joseph, 2017).

The BLM movement caught even more momentum in the wake of the 2015 Ferguson, MO protests over the shooting death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 (New York Times, 2015). In the wake of Brown's death, demonstrators from across the nation protested for more than three months. Another incident that further amplified the BLM took place on July 6, 2016 in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Falcon Heights is located in the greater metropolitan area of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. On this day, a 32-year-old African American, Philando Castile, was pulled over while driving around at 9:00 PM and killed by a police officer minutes later (MPR, 2016). The new BLM movement became a national network of racial and social justice activists with local chapters attracting a wide range of undergraduate college students in their vicinities (Chase, 2018; Hailu & Sarubbi, 2019).

The reference in this case study was this new BLM movement with the hashtag network founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi that attained a new height in racial justice activism (Sybrina, 2020). My study explored student activism during this phase of the BLM movement. I explored the basic questions regarding what participants of the movement

experienced and how they were informed about the need to rally behind the cause, and the level and degree of their participation as student activists.

Instances of Contemporary Racist Incidents on College Campuses

The nature of organizing on campus and the sociopolitical issues fueling undergraduate college students to engage in activism both on and off campus changed in scope from its previous form in the 1960s and 70s (Barnhardt, 2014). Even though race relations improved in the post-Civil Rights era, race related hate crimes and discrimination based on skin color remained an issue of controversy on college campuses and beyond (Campbell et al., 2019). Campus-based racism, also described as institutional racism, involved racial slurs, verbal abuses, written materials, and some overt displays of symbols or physical features of the targeted group (Cherry-Randle, 2013). In the immediate aftermath of Martin L. King's famous speech, Black students constituted a tiny minority on campuses of predominantly white institutions (PWI), while the vast majority of them were enrolled in historically Black colleges (Mel & Sarah, 1993). By the last decade of the 20th century, an estimated 1.3 million+ African American students were enrolled in predominantly White institutions (Mel & Sarah, 1993).

The report by Mel and Sarah (1993) found segregation has remained an entrenched way of life in many of the larger campuses in the nation. Generally, racial incidents and tensions had been prevalent on America's higher education campuses for decades, becoming more visible now due to the wider use of various media outlets, such as social media, online blogs, and the modern digital media (Cole & Harper, 2017). Examples from the last two decades alone sufficiently highlight the prevailing racial tension, including campus incidents and explicit attacks on people of African American descent in the wider public.

In addition to killings that sparked the outrage that developed into the grassroots movement, the effects of the 2016 post-presidential election days saw an increase in the extreme prevalence of high-profile hate crimes, including the rise of White supremacist individuals and groups (Kuilema et al., 2019). Johnson (2016) reported widespread instances of racial incidents across college campuses during the night Donald Trump was elected the United States president. According to Johnson, in the aftermath of Trump's surprise victory, college campuses across the United States experienced acts of racial aggression against people of color. In his report of post-election racial violence, Johnson found evidence based on the accounts of students of color from Baylor University, the University of Michigan, Ohio State University, and the University of Oklahoma, to name the few.

A year later, in 2017, a deadly incident sparked by a White supremacist group ended in the death of one person (Kuilema et al., 2019). The Unite the Right rally, involving the premises of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, resulted into the death of Heather Heyer. One of the White supremacist members of the rally drove his car into the crowd and killed Heyer. All these incidents, including the racially tense college climate coupled with the preceding incidents of the death of many Black men by predominantly White police officers and others, fueled a new dimension of student activism (Kuilema et.al, 2019). The Unite the Right rally was organized on campus, but it took place off campus in the neighboring communities. The narratives of the police-community relations officers as well as the apparent racial profiling with resultant killings amplify the existence of White supremacy. The next section also adds more understanding to the rationale for Black college student activism around racial justice in particular.

Student Activism and Political Participation

In this section, I explore student activism based on a continuum of college students' alternative ways to participate in local and national political processes in a non-traditional way (Crossley, 2008; Van Dyke, 1998). The traditional belief regarding political participation is generally considered the domain of party politics. This, in turn, leads to the discussion of how students become informed on the social issues they rally behind, and the local variations in which such social problems emerge. How do students get called to student activism and political participation to fight for social justice? Van Dyke (1998) argued student activism is not a one-time event but a continuation of historical accounts existing prior to the emergence of a particular issue. Although student activism takes place in a particular location at a particular time, student participation in protest rallies were mainly influenced by a personal predisposition to the history and culture embedded in the issue. If the issues involve something associated with student history and culture, students were more likely to engage in student activism.

The historical accounts of student rebellions, protests, and movements are earlier forms of present-day of student activism (Broadhurst, 2014). This history serves as a testament to a linear continuity of the non-traditional student political participation throughout history (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Ellsworth & Burns, 2009; Levine & Hirsch, 1991). The social and political issues influencing students' lives varied throughout all these times based on the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions in a particular time in history.

Student activists rallied behind a range of issues at different times on various college campuses across the United States (Andaluz Ruiz et al., 2017). The early days of student rebellion were against the repressive policies of college administrators at Harvard (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). The increasing number of students attending college, expansion of campuses, the

rise of more pressing social issues (Altbach & Cohen, 1990), and the demand for change in communities also affected the nature of students' participation in activism (Broadhurst, 2014; Levine & Hirsch, 1991). Local, national, and international events dictated the behavior of student participation in politics.

Altbach and Cohen (1990) explained how students mobilized around major social issues of their time. A contemporary social issue is integral to the understanding of student activism. For example, during the 1960s, the pursuit of civil rights dominated much of the agenda around which student activists rallied. Anti-war protest and cold war era peace movements also constituted the major agendas for student rallies around the country. Student activists played an important role in the Civil Rights movement and later were involved in the anti-war protests of the 1960s and early 1970s (Braungart & Braungart, 1990). Protest activities significantly infused national and international agendas and helped form student activism. Protests also attracted students across different racial backgrounds. I return to the discussion of student activism in the context of race relations in the next section of this review.

Higher education institutions echoed the motto of educating socially responsible and morally equipped future leaders who influence policy changes in their respective communities (Stepteau-Watson, 2012). This involves leadership and student personal development as part of college mission statements. Young college students begin to learn leadership skills and their future roles as community leaders as soon as they land on college grounds. Students start to develop awareness and confidence around the essence of, and the need for, political participation through student activism as part of their leadership development. Stepteau-Watson (2012) argued higher education institutions encouraged the motto of educating future leaders by incorporating

the concept of “service learning” into the curriculum. This was viewed as a strategic cornerstone of college/university administrations’ policies to promote student civic engagement.

Student activism played a role for young college students. Students participated in the community’s political process without being embraced by a traditional party structure (Crossley, 2008). It is also important to unravel the major social issues that invoked student activism at different times. In the next section, I describe how contemporary social issues serve as driving force behind student activism and cannot be separated from the concepts associated with student activism.

Social Issues and the Off-Campus Community

Student activism has its roots in the inception of higher education institutions in the United States along with prevalent social issues of the time (Barlow, 1991; Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). I limited my discussion of student activism to the major socio-political events of the 1960s and after. The next two sections of this review also align with this topic in terms of the timeline of events used to explain the undergraduate college students’ civic engagement as a remedy to the traditional political activism.

The complexities pertaining to the national and international issues of the 1960s changed the scope of student mobilization and the need for collective action (Barlow, 1991). The lessons learned from the student activists of the preceding eras and the changing dynamics in the international relations of the post-World War II Cold War inspired student mobilization that attained its climax in the 1960s and after. Barlow (1991) argued college students of the 1960s banded together to form a new and greater political movement known as the New Left. A notable political organization that developed within the New Left movement was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS; Barlow, 1991).

Considered one of the major legacies of the 1960s, students began to manifest their ideological persuasions and demanded political participation through activism of the highest order (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Barlow, 1991). As a response to emergent social justice issues of the time, the New Left's first major initiative, for example, was to address the hitherto ignored racial injustice and rampant poverty within the United States (Barlow, 1991). Besides the SDS, other student groups, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960 and the Freedom Riders in 1961, were active in the fight against the deep-seated racism and discrimination found in America (Ahmad, 1978; Bradley, 2003; Rogers, 2011). The student groups also found an important ally among the prominent equal rights groups, such as the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Barlow, 1991).

An array of studies attested to the fact that student protest reached its climax since the 1960s both in essence and scope because it managed to reach out to various communities of off-campus activists (Barlow, 1991; Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017; Van Dyke, 1998; Wilson & Curnow, 2012). Additionally, student activism also began to address the most pressing racial issue of international significance, notably the landmark Civil Rights movement. According to Van Dyke (1998), though, the SDS attained a numerical strength of about 300 chapters, these branches were limited to 15 percent of the overall college campuses throughout the United States. Van Dyke's explanation revealed the Civil Rights and the anti-war movements of the 60s were primarily limited to elite schools with a larger number of students. Another remarkable feature of this era was the intermingled racial composition of student activists around issues of civil rights and anti-war sentiments. White students exhibited the role of ally activism in the Civil Rights movement by rallying alongside their Black counterparts. The anti-war protest

attracted students across racial lines, maybe, signifying a universal student mobilization as the first of its type in essence.

The growing number of social issues in different parts of the country changed the dynamics of community organizing (Levine, 1998). Trends of localism or local student activism began to emerge in which undergraduate college students turned their attention to local issues that seemed more relevant to their own lives. Yet, the contemporary neoliberal ideological orientation, prevalent in the market-oriented society today, inevitably, attracted student activists to be part of the local, national, and international network of activism (Dominiguez, 2009; Mandle, 2000). Neoliberalism, generally, refers to free market-oriented economic reform policies such as eliminating price controls, deregulating capital markets, lowering trade barriers, as well as reducing the degree of state intervention in the economy through privatization and austerity measures.

The post 1960s student activism evolved from international and national rallying points to issues of local significance in the students' respective communities of origin (Cohen & Altbach, 1990). Although student rebellion began as a reaction to campus conditions, as reiterated in the preceding chapters, the need for policy change on a wide range of issues had to take place outside of the campus grounds. Student mobilization focused on the basic principles of social justice agendas, such as the fair distribution of wealth (Rogers, 2012), environmental justice (Dawson, 2007), fair trade (Wilson & Curnow, 2012), and all improvements around race relations (Anderson & Span, 2016). The contemporary social issues invoking student activists and their participation ranged from local, national, and international issues in scope. Racial tensions had always characterized the societal mindset on American campuses and communities at-large (Leath & Chavous, 2017). The need for equitable distribution of resources and access to

basic needs, such as access to healthcare, education, and fair housing incessantly engaged activists of all sorts in the United States (Dominiguez, 2009).

The student mobilization around labor relations and fair trade and the students' calls for environmental justice attained an international dimension in recent years (Dawson, 2007; Wilson & Curnow, 2012). American students were mainly engaged in national and local issues since the anti-Vietnam war protests. The emergence of environmental and Fair-Trade activism changed the nature of campus movements that returned to international issues of justice again. But the current hashtag revolution around racial justice issues is taking on a new dimension on American campuses with strong, local based grassroots mobilizations (Anderson & Span, 2016; Banks, 2018; Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). The controversial BLM movement became the focal point of a local grassroots mobilization with national significance around the contemporary racial justice agenda of the American society, occurring both on and off campuses. The relatively lowered tone of racial justice agenda since the Civil Rights movements gained momentum with the emergence of the BLM and social media (Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagan, 2016; Hope et al., 2016). The BLM movement engages both theoretical and political discourse on college campuses and will for a foreseeable future. Next, I briefly explain the theoretical and historical underpinnings leading up to the hashtag revolution (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017) in the most recent racial justice activism.

Black Lives Matter Student Activism and the Essence of Racial Justice

Racial justice activism of Black college students who participated in civic engagement was profoundly influenced by their exposure to the stigmatic sociopolitical worldview espoused by the predominantly White college campuses in the United States (Leath & Chavous, 2017). Black students attending predominantly White institutions (PWI) asserted themselves by echoing

the need for racial equality on college campuses. The Black students' demand for racial equality eventually spilled over to off campus communities in their vicinities, sparking activism around the issue of racial justice. Beginning with the era of the Civil Rights Movement and Malcom X as an ideology for Black student activists, the idea of self-determination and self-identity took a deep root among Black college student activists (Rogers, 2011).

The demand for racial equality by Black students across U.S. campuses served as a point of contention in terms of the paradox between Black nationalism and Black identity (i.e., whether being a Black person could conceptually be congruent with being an American; Rosenthal, 1975). The Civil Rights Movement gave rise to a distinctive identity formation in the form of Black community and from it emerged a racially homogenous Black student movement paving the way for Black student activism (Ahmad, 1978). Subsequently, in the struggle against racial segregation, mainly in the South, engagement around racial justice for Black Americans influenced Black student identity development with a far-reaching effect in their post college roles as leaders in the community. The politicizing effects college of campuses signified a new development in which racially and ethnically diverse student activism ensued a new trend of student identity development (Crossley, 2008; Grim et al., 2019; Hope et al., 2016; Keels & Durkee, 2016; Leath & Chavous, 2017).

Black college students started asserting themselves on predominantly White campuses, Asian American college students rallied for their own rights, and LatinX students began to air their voices on particular issues of immigration that affected the LatinX population in the United States (Hope et al., 2016). The emergence of multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural student movements or activism challenged the hitherto prevailing cliché that there was only a

single student movement attributed to the mainstream White middle-class expression of personal liberation as the sole domain of student activism (Barlow, 1991).

Identity-based student activism in America emerged as response to challenging the hitherto reigning status quo with a particular emphasis on race relations (Andaluz Ruiz et al., 2018). Among the ethnic and racial-oriented student activism in contemporary America, the Black student movement has grown more vocal to the extent that it was capable of reaching out to the grassroot bases in communities across the country (Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagan, 2016; Lewis-McCoy, 2018; Turner, 2000). Consequently, the intersectionality of student identity development and activism for racial equity started taking the form of what is currently known, among other things, as the Black Lives Matter Movement (Anderson & Span, 2016; Banks, 2018). This, in turn, became a compelling imperative for policy decisions among college administration in charting a new strategy to accommodate the emerging student identity development in terms of racial and ethnic orientation. Examining strategies and policies employed by higher education institution administrators in coping with new demand is the subject of the next section in this literature review.

Higher Education Administrators and Student Activism

Some studies argued social movements outside of the college grounds were instrumental in shaping student activism on, mainly, larger, and wealthier elite campuses that fostered a climate for campus activism to take root (Reger, 2018). It has also been argued that there were times of less mobilization due to turnover of student activists' leadership and students leaving campuses after graduation or for some other reason (Jordan, 2002). Contrary to this assertion, Van Dyke (1998) argued the wealthier and larger elite schools with the history of fostering

student activism fostered a culture of continuity by creating an environment of succession between the incoming and outgoing student activist leaders.

Student identity development was an integral process of grooming a future leader in society (Jacoby, 2017). This started with colleges' politicizing potential, and creating a civic-activist, minded persona (Biddix, 2014; Martin, 2014). Becoming a civic activist is considered a desirable behavior found in the mission statements of many of higher education institutions throughout the United States. A socially responsible student with a commitment to civic engagement encourages a certain type of activism, beginning with some community-based service as volunteers, even during the students' high school years and immediately preceding college (Biddix, 2014). Studies suggested students who frequently participated in variety of activities ranging from demonstration to community services accrued more knowledge and experience for their later development in student activism on campuses (Biddix, 2014).

Campus activism cannot be sustainable without nurturing partnerships between the student activists and the administration (Andaluz Ruiz et al., 2016). It is imperative for faculty and staff (the overall college administration) to support student identity development and empowerment through activism. This has taken root in higher education institutions (Kezar, 2010; Martin, 2014). Martin (2014) further explained that partnership between student activists and faculty/administration was facilitated by institutional culture in the higher education setting. Additionally, student affairs and faculty are tasked with the mission of providing resources for students as student identity development materializes through alternate interaction between students and faculty/administrators (Ropers-Huilman et al., 2019). Ropers-Huilman et al. (2019) highlighted the overall positive perception regarding student activism by faculty and administrators as part of student engagement and development.

Fewer studies exist regarding university administrators' responses to racial incidents on campuses despite continued practices of implicit racial segregation throughout various college campuses in the country (Cole, 2018; Cole & Harper, 2017). According to Cole (2018), there were fewer attempts by administrators to address the rampant racist incidents on America's campuses throughout most of the 20th century. Cole argued promoting racial justice on campuses was highly politicized as university presidents were mostly political appointees and addressing reported racial incidents was not encouraged. Cole and Harper (2018), in their studies of some university presidents' responses to reported racial incidents, further found such responses barely mentioned issues, such as racial incidents. The presidents' responses rather generalized the issues as a wider campus problem with little or no racial connotation.

Substantial gaps in research studies exist around administrative responses to racial incidents on campuses that ultimately may lead to racially identifiable student protests and activism (Cole, 2017; Jacoby, 2017; Kezar, 2010). Ignoring or downplaying reports of racist attacks in all forms has contributed to institutional racism. It is incumbent upon college administrators and all stakeholders to carefully manage dissenting voices on campus. Furthermore, student activism as a vehicle for student identity development and growth into becoming future leaders in the community must be encouraged by the administrators of those institutions of higher learning (Chambers & Phelps, 1993; Jacoby, 2017).

Today's students, perceived as agents for social change through their activism and involvement in a wide array of social issues in their communities, are viewed as an integral part of the contemporary political mobilization for social justice leadership (Jacoby, 2017). Their efforts are recognized by the higher education establishments along with the spectrum of activities associated with activism. For example, student activists protested the cheap child labor

practices in sweatshops for those working in the apparel industries under the guise of the neoliberal economic tenets explained in the previous section (Dominguez, 2009; Mandle, 2000).

As student activism continued to characterize the American higher education system, the need for supporting civic engagement and nurturing student development during the student's formative years in college has become the bedrock of campus culture (Brodhurst & Martin, 2014). Civic engagement in this context is understood in terms of the students' off campus political involvement without the traditional way of paying allegiance to a specific political party or interest groups. That means it goes beyond the simple voting rights exercised as part of ones' civil rights.

A new dynamic in student mobilization has been introduced to student movement with the advent of the fast-paced cyber communication in the era of social media (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017; Glenn, 2015). Student affairs personnel and administration in general are required to keep up with the pace in supporting and nurturing the type of activism meant to promote student identity development. Given the multitude of contemporary social issues around which student activists are rallying today, activism around the issue of racial justice is relatively an emerging phenomenon (Orum, 1970; Rogers, 2011; Rosenthal & Brown, 2014). Hence, Black student activists are emerging as a distinct area of student activism. I feature this new emergence because of the change on college campuses and the various forms of student protest. It warrants a special emphasis of support from student affairs and the college establishment as well.

Summary: Gaps and Tensions in the Literature

In this review of the literature around social issues and student movements or activism, I found a significant number of studies concerning almost all the different eras in the history of American higher education. Student movements in the United States are as old as the early

beginnings of America's higher education institutions, starting with Harvard (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). I reviewed more than 75 peer-reviewed articles and academic journals as well scholarly texts on my research question. Student rebellion, as student activism used to be called in its early days, began at America's higher education institution to protest the bad living conditions on campus (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). The rebellion evolved into a movement in the industrial and postindustrial era to address the social and economic injustices of the contemporary societies.

In the course of its evolution to its modern-day activism, student movements charted a new mechanism for political participation that was different from the traditional party politics (Van Dyke, 1998). Student activism paved a new venue for participating in political matters that influenced policy changes without belonging to a specific party establishment. Student protest or rebellion that began as a reaction to bad policies and living condition on campus developed into social justice issues with far reaching effects beyond campus grounds. These actions were directed against unjust policies. The literature identified the different eras in relation to the rise and fall or decline of student activism influenced by social conditions. In essence, there appears to be a correlation between the intensity of student activism and the prevailing political climate that induced activism or made it subside as things evolved (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Barlow, 1991; Levine & Hirsch, 1991; Wilson & Curnow, 2012).

My rationale to focus on the exploration of undergraduate students' civic engagement in contemporary social issues emanated from the fact that student activists reacted to particular social issues of their time (Broadhurst, 2014). Regardless of the ample recorded history of student activism in the United States, most of the contemporary research in this respect focused on the 1960s and after (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Barlow, 1991). Undeniably, the Civil Rights Movement, the post WWII international order, and America's war in Vietnam opened a new

frontier in the magnitude of student activism and participation for the first time in history. The Civil Rights movement injected a new social justice agenda ignored for so long, and that involved the racial justice platform around which a racially distinct Black student activism gained momentum (Orum, 1970). It is this development that culminated into today's racial justice movement involving the grassroots mobilization for the Black Lives Matter movement.

In spite of the extensive documentation around student activism in general, there is a gap in the research concerning student activism around racial justice before the 1960s. The imperatives for the movement historically rooted in the history of slavery reveals a recorded long history of injustice against America's Black citizens. But activism for racial equality found little or no mention in the student movement literature before the Civil Rights Movement broke out (Ahmad, 1978; Barlow, 1991). Another tension in the literature could be cited in the field of how Black student activists were treated in PWI. (Jones & Reddick, 2017). At the same time also, not much has been said about student activism on predominantly Black institutions as a counter comparison to the aforementioned PWI. There are a number of Black colleges in the United States with their own unique way of student mobilization around racial justice agendas (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017; Rogers, 2011). The overwhelming majority of studies lacked theoretical explanations regarding how student activists became informed of the social issues they rallied around. With the exception of the post-1960s Black student mobilization on campus, the reviews do not discuss the socio-economic background influencing the actions of student activists. Additionally, in contrast to the adequately accounted for topic of college organizing on predominantly White institutions of higher learning, there are limited resources around similar phenomenon on predominantly Black institutions (PBI) with the exception of some publications around historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU; Nnorom, 2017).

In fact, social issues that warranted social justice movements throughout history evolved from time to time. Socio-economic conditions defined in terms class relations constituted the main causes for student rallies or social mobilization for justice (Wilson & Curnow, 2012). Race relations and racial discrimination played and continue to play a vital role in organizing for racial justice (Jones & Reddick, 2017). A distinct form of student activism pertaining to the most recent trends around feminist perspectives or issues of sexual orientation as well as the demand for equal treatment before law are not also noticeably covered (Stepteau-Watson, 2012). Activism based on racial justice will potentially engage researchers as to whether Black versus White student activism constitutes a dichotomous asymmetry or whether a symmetrical relationship exists that complements each other. I also found few studies regarding the presence and analysis of ally or bystander activism. Another area of interest involves student activism in the era of social media, which warrants a new approach in studying the movement to reveal a new dynamic in the near future. Because of these gaps, my study of student activism and the BLM movement offers some answers to the unaddressed areas in research. I introduce my analytical theory used to interpret my review findings next and show how these theories may prove useful in analyzing and interpreting my review findings and research data.

Analytical Theory

I identified critical theory (Horkheimer, 1972; Tar, 1997; Wellmer, 2014), critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and student moral development theory (Abes, 2016; Biddix, 2014; Chambers & Phelps, 1993; Gardner, 2009; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000) as the most appealing theoretical approaches to explain and analyze student movements and activism in particular. Critical theory is mainly concerned with the critical review of the human condition and the remedies that should be used to change the status quo

(Horkheimer, 1972). It was a neo-Marxist theoretical conception designed to study and analyze why and how social movements occur and what changes such movements were attempting to accentuate. A relatively new discipline in social science theories, critical race theory also addresses the human condition from the point of view of race predicament and the need for a just social change (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Both critical theory and critical race theory are instrumental in explaining student activism in general as well as Black student activism in terms of the prevailing race relations. I explain the key concepts, essence, and origin of critical theory followed by critical race theory to offer perspective on my review findings. Subsequently, I then analyze the content review and my research findings using these theoretical approaches.

Critical Theory

Critical theory is a social theory or philosophy oriented toward critiquing and changing the society that emerged as a school of thought known as the Frankfurt School in the post-Marxist tradition of critiquing the economy and society (Horkheimer, 1972). As one of the top theoretical underpinnings in social sciences, mainly in the realm of political philosophy, it is an intellectual inquiry that explains the contemporary social ills, reflects on the prevailing social realty, identifies the actors, and ultimately strives to change it.

I, briefly, address the overall origin of the theory and how it evolved through times as an intellectual discourse that explains the human condition under any given system of governance. Critical theory emerged in the post-Marxist tradition in Europe, with its base in Germany in particular. A generation of early and mid-20th century German scholars ranging from Theodore Adorno to Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas and Max Horkheimer were notably known for their contributions to the field (Deranty, 2014; Wellmer, 2014). Additionally, these generations of thinkers were also known by their institutional identifier (i.e., Die Frankfurter Schule/the

Frankfurt School philosophy). Even though Horkheimer's (1972) depiction of the school's overall trajectory of critical inquiry was primarily bent on transforming capitalism to a consensual democracy, the theory's ideological core speaks to changing the human condition from oppression to freedom. It is in this light that I explain the emancipatory role of social movements. In essence, early student rebellions, then student movements, and presently student activism, are all part and parcel of the aforementioned social movements. The emancipatory ideals could also be explained through the lenses of critical theory.

While revisiting critical theory from the perspectives of the Frankfurt school of thought, Young and Macdonald (2018) alluded to the role of scholars in invoking the need for activism through critics of the existing social realty. According to Young and Macdonald (2018), scholars who engaged in the in-depth inquiry of the human condition have turned into activists. Educating the youth is the essence of scholarship and it is the educated individual whose obligation it is to change the oppressive system. Hence, critical theory is deemed to be conceptually congruent with "scholar activism."

Suzuki and Mayorga (2014) further elaborated the continuum between scholarship and activism for change as an obligation bestowed upon educators and the educated alike. I argue that it is the intellectuals' critical inquiry that leads to activism and, hence critical theory constitutes the inherent function of binding scholarship and activism. As I described in the content literature review earlier, student activism is an integral part of student development process from early on (Biddix, 2014). I used critical theory to explain student activist as agents of change and analyzed my findings in which student protesters as leaders in social justice demanded change of a prevailing status quo (Horkheimer, 1972). Macdonald and Young's (2018) study of scholar activism further illuminated how educated minds critically assess the

conditions of their respective communities vis-à-vis the imperatives for change. Hence, I chose critical theory as one of the viable theoretical approaches in my analysis of student activists' critical demand for racial justice in the BLM movement.

In a further argument, I also assert that it is the domain of critical theory to ask, assess, and inquire the underlying causes for an activism to take place and the desired values it should produce as a result. Activism, in essence, subordinates itself to a particular social cause expressed in terms of social justice and the need to change the undesirable human condition to a just state of affairs. Student activism was a mechanism charted by critically minded students as a way of participating in a political process without belonging to a particular political party while the underlying aim is to change or challenge the status quo (Crossley, 2008). By defying the traditional norms of party politics, student activists successfully influenced change in policies and regimes at times throughout history.

In my view, the very idea that critical theory had Marxism as its predecessor has created biases among the critics of the Frankfurt scholars of critical theory. But the central concept of changing the world rooted in Marxism (Marcuse & Kellner, 2005) stood the challenges of all times as it resonated with the underlying causes of activism and the imminent need for change in all instances. Therefore, critical theory as a critical assessment of the structural and systemic components of a society from the point of view of improving the human condition is the best theoretical approach to explain student activism as a phenomenon for change as well as personal development (Tar, 1977). While this being the case, the growing complexities of social issues that demanded multifaceted solutions emerged in various forms. Student activism around race relations and race specific injustices resulted into a distinct arena of activism with Black students organizing and leading it. Although the essence of activism remains the same, with the

emergence of Black student activism that gained momentum after the Civil Rights era, employing additional theoretical approach to further illuminate student activism would be appropriate. Hence, I discuss critical race theory in my next analysis of student activism with particular emphasis on black student activism after the civil rights movement.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is a critical and interpretive analysis of race and racism conceived within the legal framework across the dominant socio-cultural modes of expression (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While the critic of the human condition and the need for changing it remains the domain of critical theory, the history of race relations in America and the predicament of its Black citizens contributed to the emergence of critical race theory as an analytical lens for the study of race relations (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The origin of critical race theory is rooted mainly in the American legal system as a precursor to maintain and perpetuate the racial inequality between its Black and White citizens. Racism is understood as a social construct that is used to justify the subordination of Blacks to Whites, while it is maintained through the deprivation of social, economic, and political opportunities for Blacks. The Euro-centric conception of racism theorizes race from the point of view of social, organizational, and psychological attributes of the human society as superior or inferior. In contrast, critical race theory has its inspirations from the American Civil Rights Movement, and it viewed the American legal system as the primary perpetrator of the racial inequality as we know it today (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Hence, critical race theory is a relatively new development in the American society that directs its critics and resistance to the prevailing legal system rather than any other ideological predecessor or origin.

Scholars argued the progress made in the realm of civil liberty in America was somehow inhibited by what they called the color-blind approach to social justice that is embedded in the liberal civil rights philosophy (Kumasi, 2011). Hence, the scholars challenged the critical legal studies meant for combating racial injustices as insufficient and out of it was born critical race theory. Due to the fact critical race theory directs its critic to the legal system as the culprit, its origin goes back to the work of the Civil Rights Era legal scholars of the 1960s in which the work of the iconic W.E.B Du Bois had been rendered paramount significance in the field (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theory has become instrumental in the intervention activism by students of color to challenge the color-blind liberal legal practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). As critical race theory found a realm in the field of education, social justice activism with emphasis on seeking a level playing ground for people of color became the subject of activism as part of Black student development (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). Policies enacted by school districts, appropriation of funds, and other public policy measures did not consider the race predicament for the success of the marginalized minority.

Critical race theory is instrumental in explaining Black student activism as a mechanism to challenge racially driven injustices against people of color. Historical precedence to the contemporary Black student movement is relatively new. A distinct Black student movement or activism emerged during and after the Civil Rights Movement to challenge the status quo both on and off campuses. Dixson (2018) argued the Black contemporary grassroots movement of the BLM activism promoted by an array of Black undergraduate college students reflects the emancipatory goal of critical race theory. Besides the critical theory that examines the human condition from the point of view of class predicament, critical race theory is a relatively new

discipline that uniquely explains Black student activism as a reaction to racial injustices in the United States. The introduction of critical race theory into Black student activism resulted into a new development. The race predicament has found its own place as a major factor of marginalization by the dominant culture. Additionally, I presume Black student activism is not well studied enough as a distinct social movement that addresses race relations which is at the epicenter of the Black-White binary in America today. I believe there is way to go for critical race theory to further evolve into a dominant theoretical approach in academia as well as in the American legal system to explicitly anchor the race predicament in the law of the land. This might not be easy but there is ample potential for further debate and research to address race relations in both realms of the academia and the legal code in a foreseeable future.

Moral Development Theory

In general, moral development theory is a theoretical framework that describes college students' cognitive development as human development on a continuum, including how students grow intellectually and interpret the world around them (Abes, 2016; Gardner, 2009; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). Kohlberg's (1971) Moral Development Theory, in particular, attributed a student's cognitive development to have matured through the liberal arts education a student acquired. According to Kohlberg (1971, 1977) it is the complexities of facts and views a person absorbs through the process of education that leads to a moral judgment and ultimately a learned mind's moral development. For the purpose of my theoretical analysis of student activism in the context of student's moral development, the study of social and racial identity developments constitutes the core of an intellectual development process. Student development theorists assert various aspects of student moral development ranging from cognitive, psychological, mental, physical, racial, and identity developments

(Chambers & Phelps, 1993; Gardner, 2009; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). I focus on the moral and cognitive components of development as the most appealing theoretical approaches to explain and analyze student movements or activism leading up to student activist's social justice leadership. The traditional conception of student leadership development was limited to the roles undergraduate college students were involved in including areas of student government bodies, residence hall administrations, fraternities, sororities, and various student paraprofessional organizations (Chambers & Phelps, 1993).

The other aspect of student civic engagement by ways of protests involved dissent as a mechanism for student leadership development through civic learning (Biddix, 2014). In his analysis of "development through dissent," Biddix (2014) further argued students who frequently participated in demonstrations and protests gain more viable leadership skills, including civic awareness and knowledge in the field as well as student personality development in social justice leadership. Additionally, racial identity development, as part of student development theory, coalesces with the aforementioned critical race theory in paraphrasing student activism or civic engagement as a dynamic of student personal development (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015). Participation in BLM and the experiences of students in the process of their involvement as activists also must be explained and interpreted using critical race theory and student personal development in my findings.

Some other theoretical sources around college student personal development define student development in a linear and incremental manner, such as growth, progress, and increase in developmental capacities as a result of being enrolled in higher education institutions (Gardner, 2009). Enrollment into higher education institutions per se, may not contribute to student development but paves the way for participation and civic engagement particularly

through the actions of dissent as reiterated by Biddix (2014) earlier. Gardner (2009) also added that development could take place through challenges students face and the support they may be afforded in a positive manner to enhance student development processes. Moral development theory and theories of student personal development are combinations of frameworks that help interpret and analyze the college student personal development, one important goal of higher education institution's learning outcome for students (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000).

Having chosen the three theoretical approaches to explain the phenomenological dynamic that informed the student activists' drive for engaging in social justice activism, I, further, argue how the identified theoretical approaches in this study would best explain the analytical conceptualization of the data elements.

Theoretical Discussion and Data Analysis

The theoretical discussion in this section is an attempt to reinvigorate how the theoretical approaches discussed above were instrumental in analyzing the data elements in this study and how the approaches in the theoretical data analysis is supported by existing literature. As this study was an attempt to answer the research question of how student activists were informed of their actions for involvement in a racial justice movement and what their rational for such an involvement was, the theoretical arguments in the data analysis, I argue, provided adequate intellectual tools to explain the social dynamics of why students were involved in social activism to paraphrase the answer by analyzing the data extracted from the research participants. To this effect, I identified those data elements that could be analyzed through the three theoretical underpinnings mentioned above, also prevalent in the contemporary empirical sciences. The following brief theoretical explanations of the data analysis, at times revealed some intertwined arguments and upheld common values embedded in an activist's moral domain. Critical theory's

concern about the human condition, CRT's race predicament, and Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory that is rooted in judgment about the morality of things all resonated with an activist's moral domain to act for the purpose of preserving the common good (i.e., the preservation of a just society).

The Human Condition

Critical theory argues that the prevalence of an oppressive system would be an obstacle to human progress and an imperative for a fundamental restructuring of the society which social movement theorists also referred to as an act of social change was supposed to be imminent (Abes, 2016; Horkheimer, 1972; Isaac et al., 2020; Wellmer, 2014). As it was originally conceived by a group of social theorists from Frankfurt, Germany, this post-Marxist conception of the human condition was bent on not only theorizing the existing social disequilibrium but also on the struggle to change it (Horkheimer, 1972). In fact, social movements, protests, and activism around different social causes existed before the emergence critical theory as an approach and the idea of effectuating social change had remained the guiding spirit of such movements.

The history of student protests, rallies, and activism had remained part and parcel of the overall social movements rooted in the demand for the restructuring of the society or changing the prevailing status quo discussed above (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009; Barnhardt, 2012). Similarly, the theoretical approach that viewed domination as a menace to human progress, was instrumental in explaining why student activists were involved in matters pertaining to social inequalities or injustices. Critical theorists emphasized on organizing social movements to be of paramount importance to spearhead a more focused activist rallies with measurable goals.

While social movements denoted social mobilization, critical theory served as an ideological bedrock of critically filtering the prevailing social constellation in a system that needed to be changed. Student activism, therefore, constituted that critical arena of the inquisitive mind which was the foundation of the student mobilization on and off campus as had been recorded in the history of student movements (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). As a testament to the role student activism has played as a change agent, student protest movements had either ignited revolutions or catalyzed popular resistances that aimed at fostering social changes around the world (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Wilson & Curnow, 2012). In general, critical theory has an empirically proven and theoretically explainable foundation that could very well describe the essence of why and how college students were attracted to such change seeking movements known as student activism.

Activism as Self-Expression

Self-expression and self-reflection are intertwined cognitive processes that inquire about the morality of ones' actions and the subsequent development paths one needs to chart. Student activists, protesters, or dissenters critically reflected on their motifs for participation in social justice to change an oppressive social system. Two theories would explain these motifs: First in the form critiquing the prevailing human conditional through the lens of critical theory (Horkheimer, 1972; Tar, 1977) and an activist's moral judgment of a given human condition judged in terms of good or bad that is rooted in moral development theory as well (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). One could argue that activism is an act of self-expression by reflecting on ones' role in a society's overarching dynamism such as the pursuit of justice or a struggle for a just cause. Self-actualization through activism could only be attained in the framework of social movements because activism in itself grows out of social mobilization.

While self-reflection is individual, self-actualization could only be attained through communal setting such as that of social movements.

Racial Predicaments in Seeking Social Justice

The second theoretical approach that did best explain the spirit of college student activism with an emphasis around racial justice would be CRT, which is an analytical lens for the study of race relations (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001). Critical race theory, as a theoretical approach, is an integral part of critical theory that emphasizes the enduring structural domination based on race and racism both in terms of the historical scars it inflicted and how it is still manifesting itself in the contemporary society (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2015). Critical race theory argued Whiteness as a construct was rooted mainly in the American legal system as a pretext to maintain and perpetuate the racial inequality between its Black and White citizens (Chase, 2018). Racial justice, therefore, was born out of such informed consciousness of college students of Black and White origin that organized the movement on campus and took it to the streets. One of such instances was the student activists rally around the BLM that was the subject of this specific case study.

A critical look into the conditions of Black citizens in the United States was examined by both Blacks and Whites and CRT had an impact on the idea of allyship directed towards changing the imbalanced conditions of race relations in America. The cybermedia and the internet age had changed the level of awareness about the extent of the racial injustices and the Hashtag revolution ,as it was called, contributed more to the mobilization around racial justice activism among college students (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). Critical race theory, further had a profound theoretical influence in persuading students of White race to march for racial equality alongside their Black peers because they believed that they all belong to the same

human community both as members of the general community and as college students at the same time (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). As evidenced during the recent racial justice rallies around the country, the need for change in America's legal justice system has never been so articulated by both Blacks and Whites alike than the contemporary BLM movement.

Moral Judgement, Reasoning, and Intellectual Development

The third important theoretical underpinning that could explain student activism is Kohlberg's (1971, 1977) Moral Development Theory that explains how undergraduate college students experienced their personal and intellectual development by participating in a movement or by being part of a civic engagement. Social movement theorists argued that participation in a movement was initiated through the transmittal of information about what is moving, and the participant would acquire a developmental experience from being part of the process (Isaac et al., 2020). Student moral development theorists also alluded to the fact that participation was made possible as a result of the epistemological dynamics of knowing (Abes, 2016; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Similarly, the phenomenological values informed student activists about a particular social issue to rally around and reinforced the imperative for change as the desirable goal to be attained. In this process of active participation, students acquire different developmental stages ranging from an identity formation, cognitive or intellectual maturity, and eventually a persona of leadership in the community (Strange, 2004). Student moral development theory, therefore, is instrumental in explaining how college student activism and civic engagement could contribute to the overall college student's personal development. The study of college student activism and understanding elements of the student development dynamics through activism would be of paramount importance for higher education professionals whose duty it is to engage and nurture

morally responsible future leaders. Before concluding the analytical and explanatory discussions of the three theoretical approaches, I found it to be compelling to briefly describe Lawrence Kohlberg's (1971, 1977) Moral Development Theory that also intersects with the moral imperatives of protesting an unjust human condition as embedded in the critical theory and CRT, likewise.

Cognitive Development and Morality

As discussed in the literature review of this study, student activism in part was an act of dissent that contributed to student personal development in a social justice leadership (Biddix, 2010). Similarly, college education leads to a cognitive and moral development through the moral judgment of an inquisitive mind which I would generally describe as an intellectual development (Hersh, 1977; Kohlberg, 1971). The purpose of this study was also to understand how college educated activists attain an overall personality development through their actions of engagement. Hence, paraphrasing the moral development aspect of a college student through activism or an extracurricular engagement would do the best service for student affairs professionals and administrators alike.

According to Kohlberg (1971) and Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), moral development, though not measurable as such, could be deciphered by the moral reasoning of a person through their critical judgements of a problem and by the rational that the person attempts to resolve the problem. In retrospect, moral development theory is the realm of moral philosophy that examines a student's intellectual development as a cognitive process of discerning what is morally good and bad (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Student activists were engaged in a protest by reasoning that unjust social relations should not perpetuate in the society because that would increase the pain caused by the social ills. There are elements of cognitive inquiry, moral

reasoning, and the production of the good for the society in the engagement known as activism. That was what participants of this study exactly reiterated as to why they were involved in racial justice activism around BLM.

Kohlberg (1971) further identified six sequential stages in moral development among which the fifth stage, human right and social welfare morality, appeared to be the most appealing theoretical stage of moral development that could best explain the moral imperative that informed a student activist's decision to advocate for social justice. Advocating for BLM as a racial justice movement could be viewed as a vital component of the human rights and social welfare morality. According to this stage of moral development, society's relations were based on contractual agreements of equal footing. Any breach of such contract would lead to the social disequilibrium with a subsequent outcome of instituting an oppressive system. It is, therefore, the moral obligation of a student activist's responsibility to discern what is just and what is not when reasoning from the point of view of social equilibrium or disequilibrium. It is exactly in this setting that one could see how intertwined critical theory, CRT and moral development theory are, in the assessment of the human condition based on critical reasoning with the remedy to cure the social ill rooted in the unequal social relations.

In conclusion, the combinations of the three intertwined theoretical approaches namely, critical theory, critical race theory, and moral development theory were employed in analyzing the experiences of those student activists who participated in BLM. At the same time, these theories illuminated how the participants' experiences affected or positively influenced their personal development in social justice leadership. I next address the methodological aspect of my research and the method that best explains the qualitative inquiry in this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

My research question concerned undergraduate student activism taking place around a specific social justice issue, namely racial justice associated with the BLM movement during a four-year period. The focus of my study involved student engagement in the BLM movement during this time. The goal of this study was to investigate what informed undergraduate student activism and their civic engagement in social issues and to understand the students' experiences as a result of their civic engagement. Because this study dealt with the human subject in explaining the human experience, the research methodology employed, in essence, was qualitative.

Epistemological and Philosophical Assumptions

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers will, unavoidably, bring their own beliefs and assumptions into their research that could be equated with a sort of the researcher's conscious bias. It is, therefore, important for researchers to position themselves in their research findings since they are the very instruments of the data collected for their studies. In selecting qualitative research topics, in particular, researchers begin from what they know from their own experiences of their daily lives including encounters at home, work, or in the community (Merriam, 2009). As a researcher, I started with an assumption of what I wanted to know, and I designed my research accordingly so the findings would fit my assumptions without any twisting or manipulating the real meanings that were supposed to be extracted from the findings. Hence, I provide the underlying philosophical and epistemological assumptions framed in critical theory of the human condition.

Critical Theory for Social Justice

This particular theory identified with a group of German philosophers of the early and mid-20th century departed from the Marxist conception of the alienation of labor as the main indicator of injustice by suggesting that a critical view of the overall human condition would lead to the understanding of the social relations and their remedies (Horkheimer, 1972; Tar, 1977). In essence, alienation labor alone would not be the sole indicator of the social inequality because there are several factors that constitute the domain of unjust social relations. Social justice activism is an aspect of a more structured social movement focused on critically assessing the social disequilibrium as an indicator of the social injustice that fits into the philosophical realm of critical theory. So, my assumption was that undergraduate college students are critical thinkers whose civic engagement is guided by identifying what is socially unjust in the prevailing social relations. That is why I referenced to such factors as power, privilege, and identity as elements that would define the social relations to the effect of diagnosing the human condition in that relationship. My intention was to promote the essence of education for social justice and social justice leadership as its most desirable outcome.

The Phenomenology of Experiential Learning

Subsequent to critical theory's conception of the human condition, protesting the undesirable human condition presupposes knowing or learning the condition through the process of experiential learning. The theory of experiential learning was developed to investigate how a learner encounters elements of a new learning experience and how they render meaning to the absorbed experience through self-reflection (Kolb, 1984). Learning is a phenomenon of an individual's subjective experience whose essence and structure could be understood through the

lens of the philosophical conception of phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002, 2009). With these theoretical underpinnings and assumptions, I situated myself as a researcher with the goal of seeking the answers to the research question as embedded in my assumption that student activism is informed by some learned experiences. Phenomenology is a mechanism or a tool for objectively studying a learner's subjective experiences through consciously absorbed processes such as emotions, perceptions, and judgements (Kohlberg, 1971; Kolb, 1984).

Student activists reflected on their learned experiences of the social disequilibrium perceived as unjust and objectively acted to remedy the imbalance. Undergraduate students learned what has happened in society and made meaning out of their learned experiences. In order to describe such experiences and the structured social movements of student activism, a specific case was a necessary component to substantiate the phenomenological process of the study. I chose BLM as a case in point and the phenomenological case study approach..

Qualitative Research

As a methodological inquiry employed in various academic disciplines, mainly in social and natural sciences, qualitative research methodology served as the framework guiding my research design. Qualitative research is defined as a situated activity in which the observer, also known as the researcher, is located in the center of their research world with the set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researchers in qualitative methods examine the participants of study or a phenomenon in their natural settings and make sense out of the state of being of the things. This occurs through the interpretation of the phenomena as an act of rendering meaning to what has been studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). This could be summarized as an effort of meaning making out of what has been observed, studied, or analyzed.

I employed qualitative research methods to gather data related to my research question after recognizing the preconceived philosophical assumptions embedded in the research topic. Qualitative research is designed to inquire into a phenomenon with the intent of creating knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). My research was qualitative in essence, because it was tasked with the observation and analysis of a social phenomenon, including human experiences, activities, and patterns of behavior that explain why and how people do things they do (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009: Patton, 2015).

While reiterating the importance of qualitative inquiry as a meaning making venture in research, Patton (2015) clearly stated that both the researcher and their participants are part of the research due to the researcher's attitude, a priori knowledge, skills, knowledge, and interests. Their influence is vital to the outcome. Patton (2015) further noted that skills we use to evaluate the world around us are partly inherent and are also the integral parts of a qualitative study that we can employ in a systematic study of the unfolding dynamics of the world around us. My interest in the study of student activism as an embodiment of the general social movements in history emanates from the need for understanding how things happen in response to another triggering event in the same social setting.

In this study, undergraduate students who participated in student activism shared a certain culture as a group, while personal experiences individually might have drawn them into the phenomena under discussion. This culture-sharing group constitutes a case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, I adopted the case study approach with a slight mix of phenomenological methods of research, to investigate my overarching research question. The sub-questions added later in this section allowed me to ask questions related to the main research goal (i.e.,

investigating what types of learned experiences informed activism and how organizing on or off campus during their undergraduate years had occurred).

Case study, as a research method, has the characteristics associated with qualitative research questions, such as identifying specific cases bound in certain parameters of space and time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). The researcher's a priori knowledge or preconceived notion of the case to be studied is intended to guide the ultimate meaning giving and conclusions made about the research. As the name indicated, a case study explores what is in a case, or multiple cases, depending on a single or multiple case study research. The case as the central unit of study is identified before the data collection starts (Yin, 2018). The identified particular case in this study was the role of student activists in the BLM movement. Thus, the design for particular methods of collecting data follows, once the case is identified.

Case Study Research Method

A case study is a research method in which a detailed description of a single case is holistically and intensively analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). A deeper understanding of the case is paramount because the researcher deals with a variety of data sources collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews. The amount of data collected through different sources as well as the possible discrepancies or even contradictions within these sets of data may pose a challenge to researchers—they need to pay attention to data management under such conditions.

Case study research, as a specific method of inquiry into a case, is instrumental by thoroughly analyzing patterns of behavior within an individual, a group or organization with common experiences and culture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Even though the idea of studying a culture sharing group is also a scope shared by ethnography as a method of research, the case

study approach varies from ethnography. The case study is not concerned with how the culture works but instead with what particular sets of social settings or experiences lead to the particular culture as an aggregate pattern of behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Social activism or social movements as a way of asserting a collective demand has been out there in society as a natural impulse to some discomforting social triggers (Reger, 2018). But it is important to understand how those natural impulses take shape in the form of everything social, be it mobilization, movement, or activism. The case study research method systematically illuminates these social phenomena by discerning the particularities of each phenomenon or by establishing a case for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) described the case study as more of an instrument to help researchers identify the unit that needs to be studied. Once the case is selected, researchers identify the mode, method, and units of inquiry as a trilogy in case study research.

The study of student activism in this research work involved a specific case: the Black Lives Matter movement as a rallying cause for demanding social justice through a concerted effort known as student activism. The BLM movement was an organizational and ideological guiding spirit that spearheaded protest movements in response to local incidents at different times in different localities through its national network. Examples of such incidents were the shooting deaths of Trayvon Martin in Florida on February 17, 2012 (Botelho, 2012), Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 10, 2014 (New York Times, 2015), and Phillando Castille in Falcon Heights, Minnesota on July 16, 2016 (MPR 2016), all at the hands of police officers. The last incident in Falcon Heights, Minnesota as a case in point was bound by specific time and place, while conceptually appearing as a microcosm of multiple cases around racial justice in different places at different times. I formulated the research questions meant to explore

the consciously garnered subjective experiences of the BLM student activists and analyzed the data through the theoretical approaches I have chosen as the analytical tools in this study.

Institutional Review Board

My study involved the participation of human subjects through interviews. Safeguarding the safety, privacy, and the rights of the human participants was very well accounted for. I worked under the University of St. Thomas's Institutional Review Board that reviewed the research study to be conducted and assured that the safety of the human subjects was ascertained. To this end, I completed all course requirements as provided in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. In this "human subjects" research training, I learned the strict ethical considerations that social-behavioral-educational researchers were obliged to abide by. I have completed the required formalities to abide by the norms that I needed to follow thereby eliminating the potential for any ethical problems or issues around the participating human subjects (see Appendix 2). I am affiliated with the University of St. Thomas, which is a CITI program subscribing institution.

My methods were aimed at ensuring (to the degree possible), the safety, integrity, privacy, and welfare of my participants. Participation was voluntary and any participant reserved the right to withdraw their participation at any time during the data collection process before I submitted my study for review. The privacy of my participants was protected by securely storing the data and using pseudonyms without disclosing the actual identity of participants during the data analysis. This process was ascertained by disclosing all the necessary information to the participant and by signing a consent form already approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I assured participants of their protections to avoid violating their privacy or creating ethical issues between the researcher and participant.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

Undergraduate students at a Midwestern private university who were involved in social activism and the #BlackLivesMatter movement were my primary target participants. I reached out to a few private and public universities with varying student populations on their campuses for the purpose of diversifying the campuses from which participants were recruited. I selected undergraduate college students who were/are involved in student activism to collect data and analyze their experiences as activists. I hoped to learn what informed the student activists' decision to engage in social justice issues and what the implications were for their role and status as students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs.

As part of the eligibility criteria for participation, participants must have been undergraduate college students who were undergraduates at the time of and in the aftermath of the Philando Castile shooting during the 2016/2017 school year. They must have been willing to participate in the study and sign the consent form. Because this study was about the #BlackLivesMatter movement, students of color were expected to have been in the majority in the overall participant population. But that expected percentage was not attained. I planned to interview anywhere from 8 to 10 participants, and I was able to incorporate 10 participants in the study.

I completed a small pilot study project during the Spring of 2019. I interviewed two undergraduate students from a Midwestern private university during the month of April 2019. I conducted the interview on the campus and the experience was so pleasant that it contributed to the research interviews I conducted for this study a year later. I was very much encouraged by the willingness, the familiarity, and the enthusiasm of the participants around the topic. I submitted the consent forms that two of the pilot project participants signed to the university as a

record while maintaining the anonymity of the participants numbered as p1 and p2. I, originally, planned to use the same pattern of assigning anonymous codes to the interview participants of this dissertation as participant 1, participant 2, etc., by shortening it as p1, p2, etc., and PN depending on the number of participants. But I decided to use actual names for the participants throughout this study because I am convinced that using numbers reduces the humanity of the "human subjects" I learned in the CITI. Hence, 10 pseudonyms were used for each one of the participants of this study. Qualitative research is all about acknowledging the humanity of human participants and humanizing them with names is an important aspect of equity work in education for social justice.

Data Collection

For the purposes of collecting data for the study, I employed the following data collection methods: interviews, document analysis, and observations. Conducting personalized interviews was used as the major means of collecting data. Then, I reviewed some documents from the literature review to substantiate the claims I extracted from the interviews that aligned with the research questions. Participants were undergraduate college students from two private universities and one public university, all located in a Midwestern state's major metropolitan area. My initial plan to incorporate observation as a method of data collection was intended to observe the activities of student activists around campus such as watching deliberations of student activist organizations. Additionally, I planned to observe notice boards around campus where student activists would potentially announce calls for rallies around certain causes on campus or in town. The plan for observation did not materialize primarily due to closure of campuses following the COVID-19 public health emergency which overlapped with the time when this research was conducted. Furthermore, the nature of organizing around student activism

in terms of communication has changed and as a result the use of cyber communication such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram had substantially outweighed notice boards as a means of information exchange among student activists (Alcides & Robert, 2015; McKeon & Gitomer, 2019).

Interviews

Interviews, defined as a conversation between the researcher and the participant focused on questions pertaining to the research study, is one of the main methods in which the researcher elicits information from the participant (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) further described the different types of interviews such as standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured or informal interviews. Among these three types, I used the semi-structured interview method in which I presented my interview guide with a mix of more and less structured interview questions (see Appendix 3). I adapted semi-structured interview questions as needed and used follow-up questions as part of the interview. I followed the list of questions or issues to be explored as a guide in the process of interviewing. This helped me to ask follow-up questions based on participant's responses to the main question I posed during the conversation. I almost covered all the questions, even in situations that participants addressed most the subjects I was about to raise during the conversation. It was important for me to equally address all the questions I had listed to each and every participant because it creates an opportunity to compare each participants' experiences in responding similar questions.

A Brief Overview of Participants

My contact with the participants was first established with two of my participants during the Spring of 2019. I needed to complete a pilot interview for the data research class during that semester and I was able to get to know my first contact with the help of a faculty member. I was

introduced to the second participant through my first contact. Then, I met with these two participants on the university campus and interviewed them for the pilot project. The pilot study paved the first opportunity to recruit participants for the main dissertation research later because I maintained a continued contact with the first two pilot project interviewees mentioned above as I was advancing in my course work. I reconnected with the two in the spring of 2020 to help me connect with potential participants among their undergraduate activist peers for the major dissertation research interviews I had conducted during the summer months of 2020.

The summer of 2020 was not as conventional as the preceding summer breaks, particularly for face-to-face interactive research venues, primarily because of the COVID-19 emergency that restricted personal contact and interactions. Normally, I am more comfortable with the traditional communication method of face-to-face personal interaction. But due to the emergency and the subsequent provisions of refraining from personal meetings including research interviews, I resorted to meeting with the participants via Zoom as soon as my IRB was approved. The original plan was to interview 10 undergraduate college students from campuses in the metro area. The participant must have been enrolled in a four-year college as of the school year 2016/2017 and it did not matter whether they had graduated by the time of this interview or not. Basically, the questions I used for the pilot interview and the larger group I interviewed later were the same. The two pilot interviews had very rich data elements that were still relevant to the research questions.

The Composition of Participants

The racial and gender diversity among the participants was fairly distributed even though the selection or the recruitment process was random. Out of 10, there were three Black or African American students, three White students, one Asian student who also chose to be

identified as a person of color, one Hispanic and two White students with two different additional racial attributes as White with Arab descent and the other one as White with Hispanic origin. In terms of gender or sexual orientation, six of them identified themselves as women, two as men, one as a cisgender woman, and one as a transgender woman. Seven out of ten had disclosed their ages ranging from 20 to 25 while the remaining three did not disclose their exact ages, presumably not because of any impact but simply because they might have overlooked or forgotten to do so. Generally, by looking at each one of those who did not disclose their ages, one could easily guess that all the three would fall within the traditional age group of undergraduate student population that usually spans from 18 to 24 (Patton et al., 2016).

One-on-One Conversation with Participants

To this end, I interviewed 10 undergraduate students from three different campuses, featuring eight main questions and more follow-up questions, subsequent to the responses of the participants. For the purpose of protecting the participants' privacy, I assigned the following pseudonyms to participants as Faith, Lauren, Madison, Clair, Sydney, Luke, Jeremy, Whitney, Amy, and Lisa (see Table 1 for demographic information). I recorded the interviews on a Zoom video, transcribed electronically, and edited the manuscripts by following the original audiovisual data. I also added personal notes that I took during the interview that included the participants' body gestures that might or otherwise could not have been captured during the audiovisual interactions. Because of my preliminary conversation with participants regarding my project, the data privacy of the participants and what questions I was going to pose to them were already known to the interviewees. But some important elements of the conversation such as facial expressions or emotional interactive discourses could not be transcribed into words. Therefore, I took note of such non-verbal expressions to incorporate into my findings and

analysis sections. The notes added clarity to the recorded interviews and transcripts for the purposes of describing the findings in writing.

Table 1

Participants by Gender, Age, Race, and School attended (Private Vs Public University)

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	University (Private or Public
Faith	Woman	21	Black or African American	Private
Lauren	Cisgender Woman	21	White	Private
Madison	Woman	21	Asian or person of color	Private
Clair	Transgender Woman	20	White/Hispanic	Private
Sydney	Woman	21	Hispanic	Private
Luke	Man	25	Black or African American	Public
Jeremy	Man	unassigned	Black or African American	Private
Whitney	Woman	Unassigned	White/Arab	Private
Amy	Woman	unassigned	White	Private
Lisa	Woman	22	White	Private

Documents

Documents consist of written materials ranging from journals, newspapers, and peer-reviewed scholarly articles. I reviewed newspapers, journals, and images published with references to the events involving the BLM movement and student activism in a Midwestern Metropolitan area. Some of these images are included in the Appendix of this study. According to Merriam (2009), documents include "a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (p. 139). I already included some of the peer-reviewed scholarly articles in the literature review chapter of this study. I included reviews of newspapers, journals, and digital images as data for describing and understanding student activism. Because

BLM is the most recent phenomenon, I consciously avoided the idea of including archive materials to explain this specific movement. However, I have added some current images from BLM rallies that would signify how vocal the movement is at the moment.

Observation

Observation is defined as a research tool in which the researcher systematically observes the phenomenon of interest with a defined intent of addressing the research question (Merriam, 2009). Creswell & Poth (2018) further described observation as an "act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer, often with a note-taking instrument and recoding it for scientific purposes" (p. 166).

I planned to observe and take note of student rallies (if occurred during this study), student organization meetings (if available), and notice boards on campuses where student activists would have posted announcements that might have called for particular rallies. I intended to be physically present at the scene of my observation to systematically take notes of what was going on, who the participants were, and how the goal of the events being observed were stated. But due to some unexpected circumstances and limitations I was not able to make a personal observation. For one, the Spring and Summer months of 2020 during which this study was conducted, the COVID-19 peace time public health emergency was declared and completely limited social gatherings of the sort I planned to observe. Secondly, the traditional mechanism of communication through notice board announcements to call for a rally gave way to cyber communication and virtual methods of communication (Alcides & Robert, 2015; McKeon & Gitomer, 2019). I have included the discussion of this new trend as a shift in the paradigm of communication in organizing which would be read under the data analysis chapter of this study.

Data Analysis and Coding

Analyzing case study data may require different techniques based on how the researcher plans to approach the collected data. It is about describing the elements of the data in-depth and interpreting the meanings entailed to come up with a valid generalization out of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). I managed my collected data for analysis by coding them into categories and themes. Data coding is a systematic procedure in which a large amount of collected data are grouped into synthesizable units, usually summarized in one or two words (Bazeley, 2013; Charmaz & Bryant, 2008; Patton, 2015). Codes are used as labels to query data, assign a conceptualizable symbolic meaning to the coded information, and draw conclusions from them in qualitative research. Miles et al. (2014) identified the different types of coding, such as descriptive coding, In Vivo coding, process coding, emotion coding, values coding, evaluation coding, and dramaturgical coding to name some of the few. Additionally, Bazeley (2013) emphasized a process known as axial coding which is an act of breaking data apart and relate concepts to each other as a tool for theoretical data analysis.

The data I collected for my case study more or less led me to use a mixtures of process coding, emotion coding, and values coding (Bazeley, 2013). Process coding is a method that uses gerunds to describe processes. Emotion coding labels the emotions and lived experiences of the research participants. Values coding explains the values, attitudes, and beliefs participants uphold. These three coding types were instrumental to capture my participants' emotions, values, experiences, and explained the processes participants used to rally around a particular cause. Participants of the study had their emotions, feelings, and experiences that led them to act. Subsequently, they have their owned assigned values for their conscious structured actions framed as student activism.

My approach in my data analysis used open coding in which I began with my research question and identified the passages data that potentially addressed my central question. I conducted a pilot study in which I have interviewed two participants and coded the data. The sample coding is attached (see Appendix D). Yin (2018) indicated there are standard rules to analyzing case study data, but it is up to the researcher to establish norms to approach the process. Yin also recommended the use of some computer assisted software tools. I was able to incorporate those software tools into my data coding process which contributed to the accuracy of extracting and categorizing the codes.

Researcher Experience and Bias (Reflexive Statement)

As a researcher, I began with presupposition reflected on my experiences and knowledge that I believed I deeply knew where I was going with what I planned to study. The term "reflexivity" as a method or theory in the social sciences hinges around taking account of itself or of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated. It could also be described as an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher at every step of the research process.

I did a critical soul searching of myself introspectively, and consciously scrutinized the self as researcher. It was basically an act of performing the process of checks and balances on oneself at every step of the research process. My background was very important for the authenticity of my interaction with participants. As a student and a student of social sciences, I have weighed in the historical evolution of student activism vis-à-vis social movements and revolutions around the world. The contemporary social issues are part and parcel of my daily experiences as well and I came with the full understanding on what was going on in the community. Due to my academic background in history and political science, the study of

revolutions and social movements fascinated me throughout my intellectual pursuits. It was this empirical background that informed my view about the realty of how the current society took shape following movements and revolutions throughout history. To narrow down to a specific area of knowledge, I chose student activism as a dynamic that needed to be studied further because it was a phenomenon that occurred on campus grounds of higher education institutions. Additionally, as an aspiring educator and leader in higher education, I firmly believed knowing students would always be of paramount importance for professionals in student affairs, administrators, and faculty.

Malterud (2001) eloquently explained the influence of the researcher's background in the choice of a research topics and methodologies or methods employed as follows: "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (pp. 483–484). The perspective or position of the researcher shapes all research—quantitative, qualitative, even laboratory science.

It was possible I might have espoused a certain position pertaining to the research topic I investigated that might lead to a bias. But my introspective self-critic was an instrument that helped me to pay attention and be more conscious of my bias in the process of interacting with participants. I have also addressed this in the philosophical assumptions that the researcher could consciously assume findings could coalesce with the researcher's assumptions of what they wanted to know. Malterud (2001) further elaborated researchers may espouse some preconceptions about a certain topic, but such preconceptions are not conceptually congruent with bias, unless researchers fail to articulate those conceptions in the body of their writings.

I made sure not to infringe on the perspectives and voices of participants. The self-critic through which I created the conscious knowing of what I knew inside was an integral part of reflexivity about my preconceptions free of bias. But I had to reiterate my preconceptions so that participants were able to discern the difference between preconception and bias. This is what Patton (2015) described as mindfulness that moderates my neutrality as a researcher. Maintaining neutrality as a researcher was not as simple as the conventional neutrality of keeping oneself out of others' business. The mindfulness Patton (2015) referred to is an act of self-awareness. Researchers remain neutral with empathy to become an expert or an authority on matters being investigated and adapting to situations under any given circumstances as needed.

Another important milestone for me was the validity of the interpretation of data. It was about questioning myself about how I know what I know by reflecting on my epistemological knowing as a process. Different researchers approach a study situation from different positions or perspectives. This might lead to the development of different, although equally valid, understandings of a particular situation under study.

While some may see these different ways of knowing as a reliability problem, others feel these different ways of seeing provide a richer, more developed understanding of complex phenomena. Understanding something about the position, perspective, beliefs, and values of the researcher is an issue in all research, but particularly in qualitative research where the researcher is often constructed as the human research instrument. This is mainly true for fields in human or social sciences.

Criteria for Evaluating Qualitative Research and Reliability

Reliability is a cornerstone of qualitative research findings free from the researcher's preconceived notions of the study. I used substantive methods for evaluating the quality of my

research design by employing criteria outlined in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) particularly identified four sets of criteria for establishing reliability in qualitative research design, namely, construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

For example, a validity must not be constructed through the researcher's assumptions or prior perceptions about the subject matter that is being studied (Bazeley, 2013). There must be adequate sets of data or well-founded publications to validate the researcher's conclusion about the study. In the case of internal and external validities also, researchers may need to avoid inference as means of reaching at conclusions or generalizations. All rival sources and factors attributable to the study must be exhausted to validate the conclusive findings through the process of triangulation (Bazeley, 2013; Yin, 1988). Bazeley (2013) described triangulation as a data validation strategy in which the researcher compiles more alternative sources of data and check the comparability between the conclusions drawn and the originally obtained data.

Reliability of the Findings

The qualitative research methodology is an investigative tool to uncover meanings out of a phenomenon in which research participants narrate their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). As a researcher, I was primarily interested in understanding how undergraduate student activists interpreted their experiences of activism and how they constructed meaning out of their participation in social justice advocacy. The findings of such an inquiry based on cases would not be generalizable. Therefore, I recontacted all of the research participants who provided me with the research data I extracted through interviews. Accordingly, I sent the findings chapter of this study to each participant in which they all remained anonymous

but could be able to identity their respective portions of transcripts from which the conclusive statements were adopted as the research findings.

I advised each participant to review sections of their own assertions obtained during the research interview and to either validate the conclusive statements to have accurately represented the meaning they intended to render their experiences or to refute the accuracy of the conclusive findings drawn from the conversation. Each participant was given 10 days to respond to the inquiry with a cautionary reminder that any delay, or no response, would be interpreted as a consent to the validity of their statements as reflected in the research data findings.

Only Lauren out of the total 10 participants responded within the timeframe agreeing to the accuracy of the conclusive statements from her responses to the research questions with the exception of a transcription error that captured transgender instead of cisgender. I acknowledged the error and corrected it as requested by Lauren. The remaining nine participants did not get back to me at all, even weeks after the given due date. In fact, I have adequately informed the content and the aim of the research from the very beginning and all participants made an informed decision of their own when volunteering for the study. This concluded the process of validating the research data findings for this study.

Ethical Considerations

My research design involved the participation of human subject research and required the utmost care of protecting data privacy. Given the nature of the data I collected and the conclusive findings I anticipated from the data analysis, there appeared to be minimal impact on participants. Additionally, I was guided by high ethical and moral grounds when dealing with participants' data as I did not disclose the identity of the participants to reduce their vulnerability as such. These were young undergraduate college students who perfectly read and comprehended

the consent form I presented and explained to them. I ensured participants understood the goals of the study and their privacy protected before any interactive communication began.

The interviews for this study were completed during the summer months of 2020 in which the 10 participants provided their experiences around the mainframe of the research question through an interactive virtual Zoom conversation. The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one schedule to personalize each and every participant's experiences. Once I had the transcripts of all of the participants' interviews, I organized the data for the findings as well as the analysis sections of this study.

Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the human experiences of undergraduate college students who participated in a specified racial justice movement, BLM, in a major Metropolitan area of an American Midwestern state. The study was qualitative, in essence, and utilized the methodology of analyzing different sets of data collected through interviews and document reviews. As Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam (2009) suggested a researcher would come with their own conscious biases about the subject matter of their research, I structured the study with the questions of what I wanted to know so that the findings would not contradict the consciously conceived assumption or an a priori knowledge. The design, further, employed a phenomenological case study that invoked the common experiences of participants of different backgrounds that were involved in an activism around the same cause. Interview was the main data collection method I used to extract the data from the student participants.

I selected three theoretical approaches that could best explain the findings based on the empirical knowledge that these theories are very well suited to explain the human experience. Critical theory, for example, has been engaged in the study of the human condition in the context

of how social inequity or inequality manifested itself in different forms of social relations and how to remedy the social disequilibrium. The participants of this study reflected their experiences that these analytical tools could qualitatively explain. The limitation around personal observation of student activities on campus that could have included observing student organizing by being part of a specific deliberation by a student organization or club on campus was caused an unexpected public health emergency while this research was underway. Yet, the qualitative data elements extracted from the participant interviews were, meticulously coded into thematic categories that guided the logical flows of the findings, reflections, and the theoretical approaches used in the data analysis explained in the next chapters of this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to illuminate what informed undergraduate college students' social justice activism on campus. Additionally, I focused my investigation around the case of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in a Greater Metropolitan area of a Midwestern state (Smith, 2020; Sybrina, 2020). This qualitative study employed a phenomenological case study; a methodological approach of investigating the experiences of the participants around BLM as a model of organizing for social justice (Bazely, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002). Additionally, I emphasized on the idea of finding out how the participants' experiences around a specific case or event could be explained. The findings explain the dynamics of the emerging themes such as activism, movement, organizing, leadership, racial justice, and student development.

Participant Vignettes

As I reiterated earlier, participation in this study was voluntary and all the participants were volunteers with no compensation for their participation. Each one of them signed a consent form as required by the IRB. It must be noted that I did not pre-determine the composition of these participants by age, gender, or race when I recruited them. In fact, it was self-evident that the main identifier of this phenomenological case study, BLM, entailed the study of racial justice and one might have had in mind that potential participants would have been people of color in general or of African American descent in particular. But that was not the case and all 10 participants were recruited randomly. I used three major identifiers or attributes or the purpose of data coding the interview. These identifiers were age, gender, and race. One might ask as to why I did not include the class attribute because social justice is also the domain of critically assessing the anomalies of economic inequalities that could be described in terms of class

relations (Arendt, 2006; Kivisto, 2011). Factually, the assumption could be correct, but college education is a privilege and college students who participated in this research were able to access higher education opportunities. Potentially, college-educated individuals constitute the bulk of America's middle-class and the class distinction among college student activists is not that much of an important factor in the socioeconomic class analysis. Although class analysis is not the scope of this study, the following sections will illuminate each individual participant's personal attributes and experiences as undergraduate college student activists in their own words. The following section of the vignettes describe the synopsis of each participant's first encounter with the very incident or, at least, concept of the BLM and how that experience guided or informed their decision to get involved in college student activist movement.

Faith

Faith was a 20-year-old sophomore during the Spring of 2019 and an African American woman who grew up in a Midwestern metropolitan area. She described her reactions when she first heard about the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida when she was 13. After this incident, she began to question the law enforcement practices of the authorities and why people of African American descent were being treated differently. This could be viewed as the beginning of Faith's inquisitive intellectual curiosity as part of her personal development (Biddix, 2014; Crossley, 2018; Freire, 2005). She recalled marching to the governor's residence following the shooting death of Philando Castile in Minnesota during her high school years. During this time, she embraced the idea of Black Lives Matter because, as she described: "the essence of Black Lives Matter, something has always been like preached in my household at least so even before it was like a thing, the message has always been there in my family."

The racial background Faith had and the narratives of racial injustices to which she was exposed early on seemed to have a profound influence on her critical thinking about racial justice. Thus, the imperative for becoming an activist around the philosophy of BLM was very likely embedded in her upbringing as well. According to Faith, the idea of marching for racial justice or protesting racial profiling or injustice was part of her own family's experiences and resonated with what she was hearing when growing up in the family. Faith carried on this experience in college because she was able to critically identify the socio-economic gap between the social milieus of her childhood years through her high school experiences compared to what she was able to see at the predominantly white institution (PWI) when she first joined college. Faith shared,

> I would say like as I got older and … came to college the [university] was very different from where I'm from. I'm from a super diverse like very … lower-income high school and like [university] is very white and upper-class and I think it wasn't until I got to college that I realized that some things weren't normal.

The chronological series of events Faith described in the course of her upbringing and the way she analytically compared her pre-college experiences with what she encountered after joining campus definitely answered parts of the question regarding how undergraduate college students became informed of events that led them to get involved in social justice activism. Furthermore, Faith reiterated how college served as the first platform for expressing their views for a handful of young college students coming directly from high school and away from parental control for the first time as well. Faith expressed her feeling this way:

> for a lot of people college is really their first time that they get to be on their own without their parents constantly on them or telling them what they can and can't do so I feel like that's why college is the first place that people really get involved in social activism.

Lauren

Lauren was a 21-year-old old White college student who identified as a cisgender woman. Unlike her African American peers, Lauren had no substantial clue of information about the predicaments of people of African American origin and had no idea about the concept of BLM until she joined college. She attested growing up in a very conservative and traditional catholic family who did not encourage her involvement in matters of racial justice movements or rallies. So, college was her first experience being exposed to different points of view. Lauren explained growing up "very shielded and very sheltered:"

> My parents are super conservative very traditional Catholics who are like really against class matter so that was interesting for me coming to college and having to make that decision for myself. I think as a white person I was very shielded and very sheltered and like did not understand it at that time.

Lauren admitted about not knowing what the BLM movement entailed at all until she arrived at college. Then she decided to make her choices about getting involved in social justice activism. Additionally, she expressed how she first heard about the shooting death of Philando Castile in the summer of 2016 which coincided with the summer she graduated from high school and was preparing for college. It could be described as a prelude to Lauren's intellectual curiosity for her involvement in matters of social justice later in college. This evolved as part of her own reactions to the moral question about racial justice and as part of the sub-conscious of any fledgling young college student yearning for their personal and intellectual development:

> I remember the summer after I graduated high school, which was the summer of 2016 I had friends who got involved. That year was the year that plan. Oh, Philando Castile was murdered, and I had friends who started going to protest that was one of the big the first big occupations of I-94. So, I was seeing that a lot on the news on social media, and then also had friends that were involved. But I remember at that time, I definitely was like I was not with it. I'd like was confused and I did not get like what people were so upset about things that were happening. So then throughout like throughout college after that I would get involved in the Twin Cities area with like Black Lives Matter Minneapolis and stuff like that.

Lauren's chronicled expression of how she gradually became informed on the issues explained the nature of the disparity between how students of color and white students were acquainted with racial justice issues growing up in their respective families and how they made decisions to be part of civic engagement during their undergraduate years. This included decisions of being part of student clubs, student organizations, and organizing for racial justice or become an activist, for that matter. Moreover, Lauren's experience also resonated with the dynamics how ally activism evolved and functioned, which I explain more in the next sections.

Madison

A soft spoken, very eloquent, and expressive student who just graduated from college, Madison was a 21-year-old woman of Asian origin. She, ethnically, described herself as Chinese with a Malaysian intonation and a person of color. A first-generation Asian American in her family, she described the way she grew up in an immigrant family with a lot of rules that basically restricted her social contacts limiting her knowledge about social movements until her senior years in high school. Speaking of how she was informed of movements, rallies, and BLM

activism she was able to join in college later on, Madison emphasized the role social media played in enlightening her to begin her critical inquiry of her contemporary society's contradictions. The way the media has brought things to light for her was:

> … I first started hearing about it … I think in high school, yeah around high school is when you know the Trayvon Martin case occurred for me and a lot of other young Black boys are being killed, Eric Garner and all these names started popping up. And that's when I first started really getting aware of the Black Lives Matter movement and mostly through social media as well because a lot of people were posting about it on Instagram and Facebook.

Madison explicitly admitted her moral imperative for becoming involved in BLM activism after witnessing the killings of some young Black men by police officers. She joined a student group on campus known as feminist community. Madison also valued history as an important source of enlightenment and without knowing the history of the atrocious past of African Americans, she would not have had enough perspective of the contemporary injustices, thus justifying the rational for her decision to advocate for social justice in general and racial justice in particular. Even she went as far recognizing the sacrifices paid by the Black community in this country as an immense contribution for other immigrants:

> Understanding the movements that have been started by Black people and understanding how the rights that we have today are because of you know the immense work that Black people have done. That's really important to me because I can't do any of the activism that I'm doing without understanding the history that Black people have played such a significant role and for the rest of us.

This attestation spoke to the fact that society's experience could be shaped by an empirical knowledge that also impact how individuals viewed their actions through their lived experiences in the society. Madison used her own privilege as a student on a campus to spread the word about BLM to people who looked like her and contributed to winning more allies for the cause. Madison had a great heart for her African American peers who were directly or indirectly affected by racial profiling and maltreatments by the system in the name of law enforcement. Her experience was basically garnered through putting herself in the shoes of those victims and mourners alike. This phenomenological case study will further elaborate the theoretical underpinnings of ally activism and the pragmatic experiences of ally activists using Madison's accounts of how she attempted to help her fellow students of a different race at the same time.

Clair

Clair was a 21-year-old undergraduate student who identified as a White person with Latin American descent and a transgender woman who was still in college. Clair brought a unique perspective to this discourse when she paraphrased how she was first provoked to the racial justice conversation during her high school years. Contrary to the experiences of most of her peers who had been exposed to the BLM talk either towards the end of their high school years or after arriving on college grounds, Clair stated she was introduced to BLM during her first year in high school. This may be partly because Clair was one of the youngest among the participants and, by the time she got to high school, the BLM movement must have already been popular since it was widely picked by the mainstream and social media outlets by then.

I used the term provoked because the conversation began, according to Clair, by the classroom teacher with remarks that could have, even, ignited a fierce counteraction had it not been that members of the audience were young fresh high schoolers. Yet, Clair was critical

enough to notice the undesirable connotation the teacher's remarks entailed and contributed to the "aha" moments of her social justice awareness as she described:

> I was first introduced to the Black Lives Matter movement in high school, my first year of high school. It was when they first started, we started talking about it during class. And I think one of the more formative moments was when my teacher said, "Are these bad apples or are these like a lot of incidents that are actually affecting people?" And, so I had to critically think about my role and like my, my support because before I did not support the movement.

Some of the undergraduate students arrived at college with an a priori knowledge about racial injustice but may have had diverging sources of information about their knowledge. For students of African American origin, the issue of racial justice was embedded in their upbringing because it was part of the regular conversation in the family while others got it from readings out of curiosity, social media or through arguments like the one Clair had described above. As an example, Clair further elaborated her family to be conservative, and never got involved in any racial justice issues. She decided to get involved in matters like this due to her exposure to it early on and became progressive during her undergraduate years in college contrary to her family's conservative upbringing. This, further, illuminated the research question of how undergraduate college students became informed on issues that led them to be part of civic engagement. Their rational decision as a result of critical thinking constituted part of their emotional and intellectual development as college students.

Sydney

Coming from a different campus than the remaining eight participants, Sydney was a 21-year-old woman undergraduate student who identified herself as a LatinX with she/her specific

gender pronouns she wanted to be known by. She did not speak about her family background pertaining to their stances about social justice matters or social movements in general. In retrospect, she did not provide any information from which one could have, otherwise, deduced the level of family influence in terms of the values instilled in her growing up as it was the case with many of the participants' parental or family value influences.

Yet, Sydney's social justice advocacy and the rational for her participation in many of the rallies organized by her peers on campus evolved through her exposure to the issue during her late high school years and as soon as she was enrolled in college. When asked how she first learned about BLM, Sydney stated she picked it up from social media, during some conventional discussions on campus grounds and eventually through discussions in a formal academic classroom setting due to the relevance of the department that she was enrolled in.

Campus grounds were common platforms for undergraduate student activists, and Sydney's major activities of taking part in rallies or demonstrations began when she became involved in few demonstrations on campus. The way she learned more about the inequitable conditions in the society reminiscent of the theoretical approach rooted in critical theory, Sydney described her learning experience through a group activity that was artistic and metaphorical:

> We built a small wall out of concrete blocks and we painted the blocks with different things that can be used to oppress someone or things that we find personally oppressive to us. And then at the end of the day we tear it down. Just with rope and just like pushing it down so that is one big one that was pretty powerful and popular because there are different people coming together in different things can affect all of us, but not everyone is the same.

This implied Sydney's learning curve and how she used her critical thinking for her personal development as well. Critical thinking about an in-depth analysis of the human condition and protesting are acts of dissenting against conditions of oppression through which human development also takes place, concurrently (Biddix, 2014; Freire, 2005). Besides the common theme of BLM as a realm of racial justice, Sydney has demonstrated a keen interest in the area of immigration justice in which she mentioned her concerns about the immigration policy known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA). She did not discuss whether this immigration policy affected her directly or not. But there was a moral imperative that guided her to be part of a social justice rally, even if it did not affect her directly in a way. Sydney described her role as an ally in different instances:

> I would personally describe myself as an ally in support of others because maybe if something doesn't directly affect me it does, you know, affect someone else. And at the end of the day, it's just, you know. support does matter and no support is too small, in my opinion.

Furthermore, Sydney described a new form of activism she participated in during the summer of 2020 following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis that was believed to be a result of an excessive use of force by a Minneapolis Police officer on May 25, 2020 (Randall, 2020; Smith, 2020). It coincided with the period of COVID-19 peace time public health emergency in which college students also vacated their campuses.

In retrospect, COVID-19 affected college students' ability to organize on campus that they could have taken to the community, for example, like marching along with community activists demanding justice for George Floyd that fit the framework and the essence of BLM in wider context. Sydney, though, was able to connect with her peers through the mediums of social

media to contribute their fair share in the protest by coordinating supplies for the protesters in town. Even in the absence of a conducive environment that deterred students from using college campus as a platform for organizing, the idea of dissenting against unjust policies remained an inherent behavior among undergraduate college students as part of their evolving intellectual development. Regardless of how they were informed about events calling for protest rallies or activism and the variation in the magnitude of their participation or the role they would have assumed in each instance, dissenting against social ills remained the point of convergence among undergraduate college students' civic engagement (Eric, 2013; Isaac et al., 2020).

Luke

Now 25-years-old, Luke was undergraduate student during the school year 2016/17, the year he graduated from college. Luke identified as an African American man who grew up learning about human rights from his immigrant Oromo parents of Eastern African origin. He was already familiar with the BLM movement through social media as well as Twitter campaigns while he was in college and he was then interested in learning more about the individuals who were involved in fostering the movement. For Luke, it was a moment of inquiry out of intellectual curiosity about the historical analogies of social movements in different parts of the world.

The historical injustices that sparked the Civil Rights Movement and the contemporary BLM rallies resonated with Luke's orientation he acquired from history lessons, from his parents, family members, and the larger Oromo community in town (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). He grew up witnessing the human rights campaigns the Oromo community was running in town in protest of the abuses the Ethiopian government was committing against its citizens at that time:

> I think it really started with my upbringing. A lot of my family, my parents, specifically, but their social network grew up fighting for equal rights fighting for human rights in the Oromo community. And that's something that's always been the background me, but as a student. I was seen as Black right when I go into any social space, but specifically in 2016 there was a large massacre back in Ethiopia's Oromia region, and it really sparked for me to stop being a bystander and sort of engage more actively in the process of fighting for human rights.

Luke reiterated the unsettling feelings about the traumatic episodes he learned through the stories during his own upbringing, things he had witnessed in person and during interactions with his peers on his college campus. He narrated his feelings and reactions when he first heard about the shooting death of Philando Castile and the agonizing video clip the victim's girlfriend streamed on Facebook the moment he watched while he was in his dorm room on campus.

Although Luke graduated in 2017, his activism outside of campus and his affiliation with student organizations on campus continued to this date. He was part of a student organization in which he also assumed a leadership position at one point during his undergraduate years. He made an informed decision of passing the baton to his juniors as an outgoing graduate to, at least, maintain the continuity of student civic engagement on campus. This was a new perspective to maintain the continuity of student leadership and the prospect of undergraduate college student activism (Brown, 2016).

Jeremy

My first contact person for this project who also paved the way for most of my recruits, Jeremy introduced himself as an African American heterosexual man who graduated in 2020 from college. He was the first person I was introduced to during the pilot project interview of

2019 and has played an immense role for me to recruit most of the participants for this study. Although Jeremy did not mention his age during this conversation, he approximately was in his early 20s that fit into the traditional undergraduate age group of 18 through 24. Jeremy mentioned the breadth of the various sources of information at his disposal for becoming informed about the social justice issues in his community as well as nationally. He was inspired by the history of the Civil Rights movement and the story of how African American students had organized on some predominantly Black colleges (Gibson & Williams, 2020; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004).

As he initially mentioned during the pilot interview a year earlier, it was his family who first helped him to become acquainted with racial profiling and the systemic racial injustices rooted in the country's history. The empirical knowledge Jeremy reflected on during his undergraduate years as an activist was so profound that he, even, had decided on shifting from his original major to justice studies. When asked how he was informed of the racial injustices, in addition to his family's concerted effort of creating awareness in him early on, Jeremy added he was watching it through the news and other information outlets. He was interested in learning more about the women who founded BLM who also created a branch in the metropolitan area of his hometown as source of fascination in his venture. He noticed the various websites the BLM branch has created, and he was able to follow information released by the pages of the BLM branches.

With a combination of historically acquired knowledge and by digging through all media platforms out of intellectual curiosity, Jeremy eloquently described his rational for getting involved in social activism as a student, particularly, with BLM. He was also an organizer and he

described the informed decision he made for getting involved firsthand based on what was said as well as what he witnessed in his community:

> For once I started really getting involved, I think it I was thinking of everything just in retrospect as to that was a brother and or sister of mine who was gunned down and slayed down by the police. I look at my other racial brothers and sisters as the family as extended family and so I just felt like if one of us is going through going through a particular issue then all of us are affected by it and to people who may not agree with me on that I mean if you're a person of color and you see people who are being slain on the news constantly weekly you can't help but be motivated by that one way or another or feel it emotionally so you know the question that I had to ask myself was well what are you going to do about those feelings and emotions how are you going to be able to pursue action. So, I made that conscious decision when I came back, I went to I matriculated from a school in Wisconsin and so right when I came back the it was a shooting of Jamar Clark happened and … I was dating somebody at the time who was cousins with him but also you know again after seeing it on the news being conscious of our … history and African-Americans being targeted on a yearly basis and actually on a daily basis depending on where you are I just realized that I couldn't just sit idle.

The role Jeremy assumed in organizing rallies and protests in the framework of BLM went beyond activism on campus and had been pivotal in connecting campus movement with the grassroot outside in the community and definitely constituted Jeremy's evolution of student personal development as an activist and an emerging community leader. His role was more of ascertaining inclusiveness and equity, resource mobilization, and providing supplies for participants on the scene:

> what I did was I helped to do some of the organization within the protesting realm so once everybody was together then I would help I would help set up different stations in terms of like food stations so you know people are out there spending the night they need to be and some of them being homeless or highly mobile others who you know may have certain deficiencies and things like that and so therefore they need something to eat or something to drink so I would help man those stations when I was being active in those situations.

Furthermore, Jeremy incorporated his classroom experiences when protesting out there and he managed to bring the movement to the attention of faculty and administration. He made intellectual arguments with his peers in the classroom setting and in the academic prose while using the opportunity to bring it to the attention of the faculty. Jeremy was very well conscious of how to interconnect the acts of organizing a specific protest event or rally on campus, taking it out to the community and send a message of some sort of a moral test to the college faculty and administration alike:

> … well social media was a big way and was a very easy and accessible way for everybody to be able to organize and get together on campus and so also you know luckily I was fortunate to be able to be in a major justice and peace that talked about these issues every single class and so … when the surge of these protests were going on … the professors would be very understanding if you wanted to take a day off and go to those protests just because they knew … that's a part of experiential learning and you know what makes these classroom so great … are the dynamic discussions and … the differing perspectives and so being able to go to the to go there with my peers we were all able to absorb everything and then bring that back to the classroom so that's kind of how I got

> involved I did a lot of … on campus involvement. I did things like that where I would actually try and go out … into the streets see what's going on rather than doing a lot of on-campus activities and some of my peers strengths were being able to organize on campus and things like that so I think some of the people you may have will be able to touch on that but for me it's all about actually going into the community and speaking with folks about this issue.

Jeremy had provided key data elements during both interview sessions which included the integral parts of the answers to the research question in general and the sub-questions.

Whitney

An undergraduate white woman of Arab descent, Whitney did not mention her age. but I would have guessed her age to be in her late teens and the beginning of twenties. Whitney grew up in a small town of a predominantly white inhabitants with less exposure to issues of minority rights. There were stages in which Whitney became familiar to social movements that were more common in bigger cities other than the relative calm in the likes of the small town she grew up in. She indicated she first learned about the racial injustice practices through the media and the subsequent awakening call which happened to her during the 2016 elections as she pinpointed to a series of events that she encountered on the eve of her preparation for college. Contrary to the narrations of some of the participants with African American heritage or who identified themselves as a person of color, Whitney learned about activism against racial injustice not from her parents or immediate social milieu she was brought up in, but through her own critical cognition of the state of things and through the intellectual opportunity that college afforded her as a platform for the interaction of curious likewise young minds reminiscent of hers:

> So, I think initially it was like in high school. I grew up in a pretty small town that was like 90% white. But like via social media. I saw a lot of movements like especially I remember when Ferguson started and then of course like subsequent other police brutality cases were like big like wake-up points for me. And then after the 2016 election to that just made like everything in relation to race like more of like a cognizant thing in my life. And then when I started school at [university], I guess I got slightly more into like social justice circles, my freshman year, and … [the] English class I took happened to be reading Black resistance. So that was a really good introduction to like structural racism in a way that I hadn't seen it before. And then I got to go on a civil rights study tour down to Mississippi and Tennessee over spring break of my freshman year and … my freshman year I took a class in Cuba, actually … that was race, gender, and wrote revolution. So, we kind of compare the US and Cuba. So, my freshman year was really like scholarly and then my sophomore year I got more involved with students for justice and peace and started to go to protests more and get involved with like the electoral process, which I think kind of relates.

Whitney spoke of herself as being part of a marginalized identities but did not elaborate the experiences of her upbringing pertaining to any discriminatory incidents or marginalization she might have encountered growing up in a predominantly white township. Still, I was able to observe her inclination around historical instances of international events and her keen interest in learning more about the world outside of her immediate milieu. The idea of advocating for other people and soul searching the nature of structural marginalization were component parts of Whitney's interests in the arena of social justice. With that persuasion, Whitney stood between playing the roles of an ally and an organizer. She, on one hand, believed in the principle that she

should not be dictating what Black organizers had to do when it came to organizing for anti-discrimination rallies by her African American peers, while she also believed in being a backup for the effort on the other.

The way Whitney and some other participants who identified themselves as White attempted to describe how they wished to get involved in racial justice activism constituted a specific area of activism that could be categorized as allyship (Becker, 2017; Clark, 2019; Fingerhut & Hardy, 2020; Sealey, 2018). In fact, ally activism has distinct characteristics and a distinct history of its own. Additionally, Whitney praised the campus that provided her the space as a platform for organizing and learning more about social movements. Yet, organizing on campus, according to Whitney, did not happen easily because of the hurdles that could have come from the overall college administration and structure. Whitney expressed her feelings and developmental experiences as a student through her activism that systemic racism would remain the source of her frustration:

> I think it is, kind of frustrating at times because like knowing you within academia, which has such like a racist history … continues to uphold like racist ideals in some ways is kind of frustrating because I'm like, especially when … part of your academic focus is like equity related or within marginalized identities … it's kind of a balance of … learning more. To be able to kind of correct some racist ideals within an institution of racism is like a really hard struggle to balance between. So … particularly for me like I am doing international economics and I want my focus to be within Southwest Asia, North Africa because there's a lot of … incorrect views about like economies and shit there … But then also, I'm a Spanish minor and also, I'm minoring in American culture

> and … So, it's all like within kind of like culture and ethnicity. Yeah, but it's just a really interesting balance within like institutions that are kind of racist.

Whitney's experiences or frustrations, reiterated in her statements above, definitely constituted the inquisitive mind of a college student as a bedrock of student identity development and learning. For students, there could be a high probability in such a way that their activism in the community would continue, even, years after they graduated from college, which would constitute the integral parts of the mainstream community leaders.

Amy

An undergraduate student who racially identified herself as a White and as woman in terms of her gender identity, Amy was one of the three participants who did not disclose their age. But observing from her own narratives and physical appearance, she would fall within the range of the traditional undergraduate age group spanning from 18 to 24. Her experiences or exposure to student activism were almost like the experiences of most of the participants who racially identified as White.

Amy's first encounter about social justice topics was during her high school years through word of mouth from someone and she learned more about BLM during her first year in college. Her choice of academic major in college also provided her with more opportunity to experience the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of racial justice with the BLM through intellectual discourse. The process had incorporated the dualities of intellectual and human development (i.e., it nurtured the student's intellectual curiosity and awareness around the human condition within the community; Abes, 2016; Gardner, 2009). Amy's participation in rallies was also motivated by her intellectual curiosity, her moral guidance and

peer influence which was an important aspect of cooperation in activism as a convergence of the likeminded human agents:

> And that told stories of specific cases, it was a theology course, actually. So, we had a lot of discussion about like the purpose of life … as a movement and everybody was like an organization as well. … I also thought of I have a lot of peers who are like creating their own content as well as like surrounding … what white allies ship as well as I've begun to follow a lot of like leaders within the Black Lives Matter movement to and so their accounts are just like really keep it up on their content and reading … I think that's a lot, but I really have because I haven't been like physically in Minneapolis, where there's like tremendous organizing happening. And people mobilizing, yeah, I had liked it. I had certainly reoccurring sentiments and like I want to do.

Amy narrated the range of her participation in various justice rallies such as environmental justice, immigration policy issues and racial justice protests. She played a role as an organizer for the nonracial components of the movements and as an ally in the racial justice campaigns as was the case for other white student ally activists (Becker, 2017; Fingerhut & Hardy, 2020; Sealey, 2018).

Lisa

Finally, Lisa was a 22-year-old White woman undergraduate student who just graduated from college during the Spring of 2020. She grew up in a conservative rural community in a Midwestern state and was very much excited about getting out of a smaller community to a major metropolitan area where she was able to explore more things in life. The opportunity that coming to the cities afforded her was multifaceted because her information about what was going on in major cities was very blurry and it was in the cities that she, firsthand, experienced the

social events that were taking place. It is true that joining college and getting acquainted with or having new social connections constitute the most important elements for intellectual curiosity and human development. Lisa was, definitely, an open-minded person who had an inquisitive mind and was ready to learn from the new environment she had the opportunity to live in as a student and as an activist. When asked about how she learned about BLM, if at all, she recalled:

> And so, I had the pleasure of like learning a lot about activism specifically. I remember hearing about it back when I was in high school and I went to a small rural high school in Iowa. That was pretty conservative. And, I was really excited to get out. And when I heard a little bit about it didn't know exactly everything that was going on, especially like specifics with like Philando Castile, things like that. … and then once I got into the cities, I just like realized everything. Everything was happening. And I knew, I think I knew what the Black Lives Matter movement was at that point. But I wasn't fully aware of it. I went to a predominantly like 97% Whites' school. So … freshman, sophomore year there was a lot of different things that would go on and I … graduated with my degree … in justice.

A component part of a college student's intellectual development, Lisa's activism had an underlying empirical and philosophical persuasion as she expressed in the conversation. Some elements of gender inequality that were implicitly anchored in the constitutional document as such were, for example, the phrasal expression, "all men are created equal" was one of the reasons for Lisa to harbor dissenting views about systemic injustices. She further stated that racism and the horrible experiences of African American citizens' agonizing history in this country motivated her as additional impetus for her critical views while she was an undergraduate college student.

The data from all the 10 participants, interestingly, included diverging and converging viewpoints of how they were attracted to social activism as college students. Similarly, they all attested to the fact that college was a common platform which shaped the student activists' experiences into a universal social justice leadership. I explain the different experiences of the participants on the bases of the attributes and the themes that emerged out of the coded words next. Then, the themes that conceptualized the phenomena of student experiences illuminate the Findings that would address the research questions. The data elements and the Findings will be analyzed with the theoretical tools identified in this study. To be precise, the different themes that emerged from the data coding revolved around the same phenomenological pattern, i.e., student activism was centered around similar values. Hence, it is to address some common intersections of these themes before directly getting into the findings.

Thematic Intersections

The undergraduate student group I studied in this research reflected how divergent approaches converged on a similar goal orientation of seeking social justice for all as the core of student moral development. As part of my findings, which I further elaborate in the following sections, the divergence of approach was, likely, the result of the student's racial background to which these participants had been socialized in their early formative years before college.

The common characteristic features of these racially and gender diverse undergraduate students was rooted in their zeal for social change through student activism either as a leader, as an organizer, or as an ally. Growing up in their respective families or communities, they had different value orientation about the society in general and their immediate social milieus in particular. Some of the White students spoke of their conservative families who instilled only the values of White privilege in them when growing up. Students of African American background,

on the other hand, grew up in an environment in which racial discrimination and practices of perpetual inequalities were preached to them starting from the age they were able capture information around race relations. Students from immigrant families were also torn between the struggles of coping up with the mainstream culture they were born to and their ancestors' stories of how unjust the systems their families were obliged to escape. Almost all the participants, though, seemed to have come from a middle-class background whose families were fortunate enough to access college education for their children, still, had different narratives of the justice system.

It was the intersectionality values that students adhered to, rather than disparity in terms of class, race, or gender that, one way or another, brought participants to a point of convergence in their philosophical persuasion to engage in activism for social equality. A White woman's predicament who is subjected to systemic gender inequality, for example, intersects with that of a Black man's who could potentially be subjected to racial inequality at any point in time. The experience of not being equally treated, whether the treatment was based on race or gender as a predicament would constitute the very intersectionality for those who are seeking justice to be equal. Further, the undergraduate age group that congregated on the premises of higher education grounds or college campuses tended to espouse similar ideals and worldview as a common source of their intellectual curiosity. As a result, most of the words and themes that emerged from the 10 interviews reflected a wide range of commonalty or convergence as to how these students were informing themselves around the subject matters of social justice, activism, and dissenting against systems of domination (Klein, 2016).

Thematic Data Analysis

There were two alternatives I had at my disposal for data coding. One was the manual coding whereas the second one was software supported coding. I had the privilege of utilizing In Vivo, the data coding software, through the university's library system with the opportunity to remotely access this vital resource during the public health emergency's social distancing provision. This software coding was a very sophisticated way of extracting words that potentially represented the participants' thoughts expressed in sentences through this process of data coding (Merriam, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the code words are categorized into phrases or sub-categories to conceptually represent the phenomenon of the participant's experiences.

I put all 10 interviews one-by-one through the systemic software coding process as instructed by the step by step guide menu. Then, I highlighted paragraphs and sentences as needed to figure out the code words participants uttered and to tally those code words on how often they came up through each one of the documents as well as in all 10 data sources. Each code word was tallied based on how many documents it appeared in and the total number of times it was mentioned in either one of the 10 data sources as well as in all 10 interviews. The coding software designated the data sources as files and the frequency at which each code word appeared in either of these data sources as references. I was able to summarize the sub-categories into closely related code words and came up with an adequate set of thematic words that I categorized into themes (Bazeley, 2013).

Emerging Themes and Thematic Analysis

Themes are, generally, a set of words or phrases constructed from the code words that designate relational sentiments or represent closely related concepts with similar meaning and

content (Bazeley, 2013; Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana (2009), a theme conceptualizes a phenomenon as experienced by different individuals or social groups that could be theorized and summed up in analytically generalizable conclusions. In this section of data findings, for example, I coded several words and condensed them into thematic expressions based on the closest meaning each participant's experiences were captured in their statements. The question was how undergraduate college students became informed on social justice issues they rallied around or participated in as student activists. Each one of them explained their experiences in different ways while the essence of their involvement converged around the values entailed in social justice as universal human desire to live in freedom. A thematic analysis of conceptualized themes incorporates a very descriptive style of writing ideas or narratives contained in a qualitative research interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When I transcribed the interviews, I conducted with the participants, I was able to identify such descriptive explanations of how each and every one of them told the stories of their experiences in different ways but reflected on similar thematic concepts.

Themes

The following themes emerged from the coded data of the 10 interviews. These included the various data elements such as activism, student, movement, BLM, campus, community, engagement, organize, justice, protest, leadership, rally, ally, family, college, race, color, empowerment, sit-in, crime, racial justice, student development, identity, higher education, administration, faculty, empowerment, experience, media, orientation, revolution, equity, equality, class, White, Black, Latino, history, ideology, progressive, multicultural, supremacy liberation, Civil Rights, conservative, middle class, blue collar, privilege, oppression, intersectionality, solidarity, voices and minority to list some. There were also concepts

associated with fairness such as the way law enforcement authorities were treating ordinary people. These emergent codes were relevant to the questions I posed to participants as to how undergraduate college students became informed on a particular social event and how they experienced it. Following the identification of those coded words, I was able to categorize them in to conceptualizable categories as racial discrimination, organizing for social justice, race relations on campus and in the community, student protest or activism, and empowering the marginalized sector of the society.

Based on what had been extracted from these coded data elements, I was able to formulate major themes that closely conceptualized the very essence of student development, critical thinking, and elements of justice that were manifested in the participants' responses to how and why they were attracted to being part of social justice movements, protests, and eventually activism. These were also concepts embedded in the three theoretical approaches I had identified for the theoretical analysis piece of this research, namely, critical theory, critical race theory (CRT), and moral development theory.

Accordingly, the major thematic concepts also known as themes emerged in the process of conceptualizing the coded data elements, which I grouped into five broader categories and eight sub-categories. The major categories were: 1) social justice movements against oppressive systems; 2) Black Lives Matter movement as a specific case highlighting a contemporary social justice activism; 3) college student protest rallies and activism as an integral part of student identity formation; 4) higher education's extra-curricular attractions and undergraduate students' civic discourses on campus; and 5) multiculturalism, racial disparity, and cooperation among students of converging ideologies. Subsequently, the eight sub-categories included: a) social justice activism, b) organizing for social activism, c) liberation ideology, d) solidarity and

cooperation or allyship, e) race relations, f) social justice leadership, g) self-reflection and identity formation, and h) activism, communication, and media.

These major themes and sub-categories would best explain the empirical and phenomenological dynamism of the human experience in the arenas of organizing social movements for social justice. Similarly, the themes had sufficiently captured all the necessary conceptual tools to analyze the overall processes that informed undergraduate student activism or civic engagement on higher education premises as well as among the adjoining off-campus communities. The following five topics chronicled the most important Findings to the research questions based on the data elements extracted from the participant interviews and categorized into conceptually descriptive group of words known as themes.

Activism as a Social Justice Movement Against Oppressive Systems

College student activists that participated in this study emphasized the goal of their participation in social justice activism as an act of protesting unjust social orders in different forms. Campus grounds had created conducive environments for such civic engagements in which like mined undergraduates were able to congregate and organize for political efficacy that did not require a specific party affiliation (Crossley, 2008). Social movements in general were aimed at creating an equitable sociopolitical system in human relations by changing the unjust variables (Leath & Chavous, 2017). Furthermore, Leath and Chavous (2017) illuminated that the analytical abilities of individuals whose awareness of the unjust social predicaments ignited dissenting views against the prevailing systemic social inequalities. It was the combination of such consciousness and awareness about the social inequality that inspired civic engagement as one of the tributaries of the overall social movements. One of the participants, Sydney, cited

about her awareness of unjust social practices for going out to protest and her awareness was the drive for getting involved no matter who the victim was:

> I think for me it and I don't think some people think it's this simple, but I don't know, for me it seemed that it was just the right thing to do. Was just to support people that were either feeling, you know, we're demonstrating because we feel unsafe or what the root of whatever demonstration. We're going to talk about. But it's, you know, for me it's like if you know in my again like I said earlier, it might not affect me personally. But at the end of the day, if I you know it does affect someone. And so, if I could help in any sort of way just support or just show that I care and no matter what the gesture would be, I think. I've just found meaning and just being there in support, regardless of whether it's my issue or whether it's just being there for a friend or a colleague, especially Yeah….

Civic engagement within the context of higher education included student activists protesting different forms of discrimination or policies on campus as well as major policy issues perceived as inequitable and unfair that would affect the lives of the off-campus communities. Crossley (2008) examined how contentious social movements attracted student activists in a higher education institution's campus setting. To this end, Crossley (2008) argued that social movements hailed from the society and reached out to the politicized student activists on campus.

In other words, it is possible to assert that college campuses were suited to a de facto institutionalized phenomenon of civic engagement in which social movements nurtured college student activism and the very dynamics of campus activism also reciprocated its role by fueling protests that helped perpetuate social movements as an incessant process. College students learned from past experiences through historical narratives and were committed to continue the

tradition of keeping social movements alive. Clair has indicated such commitment in her interview:

> I think you have to learn a lot from these situations. And I think studying the social justice tactics that are used in each event are really important. Just the different ways that different students different co organizers or different community organizers are trying to face the systemic issues. And so, like, another thing that kind of inspired me to be a student activist was the Chicano Movement of the 60s, where student organizations student organizers. Did walkouts when they were experiencing justice. So being able to live through some of these experiences and learn from some of these experiences helps us to deconstruct the systemic issues that we're facing now.

Practically speaking, these chain of events such as campus as a college student civic engagement site, the student activists and the contentious social issues in the community constituted the anatomy of social movements fueled by social justice activism. The BLM movement, which is the point of reference in this case study, for example, was not a reaction to an incident on campus but a response to a protest ignited by the off-campus community against racial violence that eventually turned into a locally conceived racial justice movement with national and international scope. Yet, college student activists were able to bring the functions of organizing for BLM to college premises in which campus grounds became subsidiaries for the movement with the goal of perpetuating the off-campus rallies to continue the course. Among the participants of this study, Faith had expressed the recollections of her experiences as follows:

> Participants around the BLM it gave a platform for students who were engaged already engaged in the movement and maybe and also for students that maybe didn't realize some of the things that were going on campus were happening so it gave them kind of a wake-up call like I

didn't know that people or actually like this like I didn't realize this was actually such a big problem and that was a way even for like some of my friends that I have that we're like you know I feel like I can you know I know that you've talked about people saying stupid stuff for like just small issues but they haven't realized that it was such a large issue on campus just because it's not something that they've ever had to experience so I think it was a wake-up call also for a lot of students to pay more attention.

Basically, the 'wake-up' call Faith was referring to aligned with the argument that social movements hailed out of the society and would ring a warning sign within the minds of, even, the less politicized undergraduate college students on higher education grounds. A student's civic engagement in the form of activism would be a natural response to such alarming calls for social justice. In conclusion, this was one of the thematic findings that illuminate the research question around what informed college student activism and how higher education premises were suited to nurturing undergraduate college student civic engagement.

Black Lives Matter Movement as a Specific Case Highlighting a Contemporary Social Justice Activism

The rally around social justice causes as a moral imperative that led college students to participate in activism aligned with the research question I posed to investigate how and why students became involved in social justice rallies and how BLM served the participating students as a contemporary protest model in activism. The expressive inner experiences of undergraduate college students who participated in some sort of student protest reflected how college campuses and off campus communities were intertwined in the fight for social justice. The focus of my study was the BLM movement which signified a series of student activism around occasionally occurring local incidents relevant to the social and racial justice issues.

The localized issue in the framework of the BLM movement in which this case study was centered around was the shooting death of the African American man in Falcon Heights, Minnesota on July 16, 2016. The uproar around Philando Castile's death on this day ignited another landmark protest event localized in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota attracting a wide range of community members in which college student activists took the lead in organizing. When I asked how they, as college students, connected with community organizers in the BLM movement, most of the white students responded by referring to perspectives of moral imperatives other than such compelling factors of being directly affected by the uproars in the racial profiling practices of policing or law enforcement practices that involved excessive force. The 20-year-old white woman student, Lisa, for example, replied to this question by citing the need to be there for her Black peers when a group of White persons were overstepping the rights of others:

> My Second common thing in particular is after we did have a racial incident at a racist incident at [university] and we had this like meeting in an auditorium and a lot of Black students talked about how this needs to stop happening, of course. And I remember one of them from one of my classes, Malcolm. He was up there. And I think … so. I'm afraid of always overstepping my bounds and I don't ever want to be in a space … Black space of whatever space … I don't want to disrupt the space. And so I think like in that situation, I think it was good to know that like we're there because we need to be because it's other white people that are being shitty like and horrible and yeah and I think when Philando Castile happened … I was in Iowa and not completely educated on what was going on and I know that now with it talked a lot about how the riots or like the protesting that is going on is a lot more like has had more white folk which like thank

> God, because like when I was interviewed a man on a motorcycle was like yelling at the … protesters. Specifically, Black protesters and three white guys stepped in and like stepped in front of him. So, like, I don't have to listen to him, and I think like … putting together a white person putting yourself between like police and things like that are just like important.

Replying to the same question, another White female student, Whitney, also cited the moral aspects of wanting to deeply understand how structural racism worked in this county in addition to slightly feeling marginalized herself because of her Arab identity that was not fully considered in the mainstream White privilege context:

> Yeah, um, I think obviously like being within marginalized identities myself. I guess like that creates kind of like an obvious like you know advocate for other people. If you want other people to advocate for you. Also, just like, Yeah, I don't know. I think understanding structural racism. It's so much harder to be like, I like that's not my thing to get engaged with when you understand like the construction of it. So then, like, morally, it's just like, I don't know, like being a decent person. I think it is a kind of frustrating at times because like knowing your within academia, which has Such like a racist history being continues to uphold like racist ideals in some ways is kind of frustrating because I'm like, especially when you like part of your academic focus is like equity related or within marginalized identities, like it's kind of a balance of like learning more.to be able to kind of correct some racist ideals within an institution of racism is like a really hard struggle to balance between So like, particularly for me like I am doing international economics and I want my focus to be within Southwest Asia, North Africa because there's a lot of like incorrect views about like economies and shit there um. But then also,

> I'm a Spanish minor and also, I'm monitoring in American culture and different. So, it's all like within kind of like culture and ethnicity. Yeah, but it's just a really interesting balance within like institutions that are kind of racist.

Amy, a White woman undergraduate student added to this narrative by implying her motives as a justice seeking activist with an "appetite for change" as she described it in her words. The moral imperative these participants were referring to was, the basis of an underlying inquisitive mind that asked why things were being run in a way they did not seem to be running right. Basically, these White student participants compared their white privileges with that of their Black peers. Amy's stance around the issue of racial justice was more motivated by the need for food justice she somehow deemed vital to rally for in some disadvantaged communities. Amy believed that her actions in support for food justice rally in a, predominantly, Black community in a way promoted racial justice that was contemporarily articulated by the BLM movement:

> So, I have not before this is not attended a Black Lives Matter rally, I've attended several rallies surrounding like immigration and solidarity and many of us as well as several surrounding climate Justice. Certainly, climate justice those are very transactional in there. Yeah, in their inbox of racism within our communities. But yeah, I had not attended a BLM rally or movement. I'm trying to think I am. I've done a lot of work with organizations who like I've worked with appetite for change. I North Minneapolis. So that wasn't like we weren't mobilizing the mark protesting in the streets, but they do. So much work in like community building. And they do a lot with food justice and like food accessibility our good bright side produce. I don't know if you've heard of them through interviews, but I worked for them all last summer in North Minneapolis and ran farm

> stands weekly like four or five days a week. And so that was that was very tangible like work like that was like guys yeah trained at getting paid for it was a mobilizing.

Another participant who was a 20-year-old White transwoman who also identified as LatinX, Clair, spoke to the moral values of being free as a motive to rally around social justice causes in general and racial justice activism in particular. Clair's self-image was as a progressive activist whose motive and ideal was to see and live in a free society. Her persuasion in committing herself to promote a free society would not allow the prevalence of racially segregated or disadvantaged communities. So, Clair's informing agent for rallying in social justice activism was rooted in her progressive ideals though she grew up in a conservative family who did not even pick a single piece of conversation around race relations as she stated in her interview. This answered one aspect of how undergraduate college students were informed about social justice activism and how BLM movement resonated with all participants as a case for convergence. Clair narrated her experience of how she was first introduced to the concept of BLM, what her reaction was and how she eventually made meaning out of it:

> I was first introduced to the Black Lives Matter movement in high school, my first year of high school. It was when they first started, we started talking about it during class. And I think one of the more formative moments was when my teacher said, "Are these bad apples or are these like a lot of incidents that are actually affecting people." And, so I had to critically think about my role and like my support because before I did not support the movement. I, I didn't think that cops were perpetrators of injustice at the time. And, so having to critically think about what the cops were there for and what the Black Lives Matter movement was trying to do was important for me to understand and eventually support them. And another thing that sparked my interest was that he said something very

> convincing that if, Or, do you think that Martin Luther King would have supported the Black Lives Matter movement hadn't been back then And He said, Yes! And that was something really striking because I always had like a painted picture that the civil rights movement was like this great thing, you know, he just like marched and then everybody was happy. And we didn't really understand that, like, people were like hosed down and killed and thrown in jail and harassed and even continues today. So, it was like convincing for me to say like Oh yeah, he would support this, because this is this is black liberation. So that was kind of my first introduction to the Black Lives Matter movement.

For more clarity, I have reiterated in different sections of this study that my goal was not, solely, emphasizing racial justice as one aspect of the overall social justice system. Rather, I aimed at highlighting how undergraduate college students engaged in social justice activism and what informed the students' activist consciousness. Since I embarked on a phenomenological case study to illuminate the research question, I picked the BLM movement as the specific case for the study which happened to be a racial justice domain but still could explain the dynamics of organizing for social justice, an Action that was embraced by Blacks, Whites and people of color as well. This thematic section speaks to the particularity of BLM as contemporary case in point while also resonating with the historical past. Therefore, this BLM case study bridged the past and present accounts of racial justice and the subsequent reactions of the society in terms of social justice activist movements around the subject matter.

Student protests, rebellions and dissenting against some ill-conceived campus policies were prevalent ever since the beginning of higher education institutions and in the United States (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). But there was not any recorded or remarkably visible account of college student led movements around racial justice issues until the advent the Civil Rights era.

Orum (1970) described the beginning of White allyship activism alongside Black demonstrators during the 1960s and 70s Civil Rights rallies demanding equal right for Black citizens in the United States. In fact, this was the time when White folks stood in solidarity with fellow Black citizens in the context the general mobilization against racial segregation. In retrospect, college student activists' led campus mobilization was not so vocal even though some expressed sympathies articulated by White ally activists have become common practices after the 1960s.

The turn of the 21st century, the internet age communication, and the growing consciousness around the agonizing race relation was highlighted with the emergence of the cyber era Hashtag movements among which the Black Lives Matter phenomenon dramatically went viral around the world. Undergraduate college students of different racial backgrounds were attracted to the movement almost indiscriminately and BLM signaled a high time in the scope of solidarity among students of different races, genders, or sexual orientations. The social media campaign college student activists launched through the cyber platform even elevated the BLM movement as the number one movement ignited by the #Hashtag Revolution (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017).

The racial and gender diversity including diversity in the sexual orientations of participants of this study described in the previous section of this chapter clearly indicated how BLM could best represent a case study in college student activism around social justice activism, even if the movement inclined towards advocating for equality in the arena of race relations.

Furthermore, participants were explicit about why they were interested in contributing their fair share in the campaign that was spearheaded by the principles of the BLM, i.e., racial equity as the centrifugal force of the mobilization. A young black male participant of this study,

Jeremy, had expressed how he was able to find allies from his White college peers in his efforts of mobilizing for the BLM cause:

> ….yeah, yes there definitely some and again just going back to my major in justice and peace I'd say that it's probably 90% white women who were in that major and then there's the you know there's the 2% of minorities who were in there so you already have a population like that who were getting involved and who were allies in this movement.

Jeremy was a Black student who was attending a predominantly white institution because he already indicated that over 90% of his campus's student population was White with women in the majority, even, among the Whites. Yet, the idea of organizing for the BLM movement has won support from the dominant group who have become allies in college students' racial justice activism. Similarly, a White cisgender participant in this study, Lauren, paraphrased the imperatives for a White allyship (Edwards, 2006) in the struggle for racial equality in her response:

> …..Um, I feel like we definitely have a very important role. In supporting what's going on. But I also feel like we've taken up enough space and have had enough leadership positions throughout history that it's kind of like We don't, we don't need to be the people talking all the time. We don't need to be the person leading it we can be there supporting and like listening to the voices that are actually directly affected by like things like police violence, systemic racism. So I do think we have a really important role. But I don't think that role always has to be like the person leading the March or whatever.

There is a value embedded in Lauren's arguments for supporting a movement against systemic racism as she reflected on the immorality of always being the dominating race. The value under discussion in here is the morality of standing for justice as an indivisible value. Additionally,

Lauren emphasized the need for yielding a leadership position for the marginalized sector of the society to lead the ideals for liberation so that members of the marginalized group could feel the ownership of their struggle to be free of systemic oppression. The morality of maintaining justice and the nature of its indivisibility attested to the BLM movement's potential as cause for rallying people of different races around justice as a colorblind value. Additionally, Madison, An Asian-American described her experiences and contributions in supporting the BLM movement as follows:

> Definitely, not an organizer. I was just I think for the Black Lives Matter movement in particular. I have not played any organizing roles in my opinion. I've done some advocacy roles, I would say, like, so I go to protests and I show up, you know, to meetings and that kind of stuff I actively call my representatives, I'm sending emails. And posting about it on social media. I'm inviting other people into the movement as well to get involved. And then I also have kind of created my own ways of engaging people based off of the Black Lives Matter movement. So, I created a series called dear Asian America on my Instagram, it's a conversation that is that I hold between myself and two of my friends from high school. And they also went to St. Thomas as well. But we talked about, you know, specifically how Asian Americans fit into the Black Lives Matter movement because I think it's really important that we like I'm using my privilege to reach out to people who look like me and try to engage them in the movement because It like having, having a white person, for example, or having an Asian American person, for example, like, try to tell a white person. Hey, you should really be involved in the Black Lives Matter movement just doesn't have the same effect. If an Asian American were to tell another Asian American, hey, I really think that you should join this movement

> because there's just something about someone who looks like you and who's standing for movement and you know you think to yourself, Okay, well, if they look like me. And they're involved with this movement. Maybe I can be involved with this movement, too. So, I've been trying to use my privilege in that sense. It's not directly linked to the official Black Lives Matter movement at all, but I am just doing what I can in relation to help the movement and spread the word and spread awareness.

Though she was trying to downplay her role as an organizer, just to uplift her colleagues who might have been at the forefront, Madison had played an organizing role to. She had referenced to the various information dissemination efforts she has made and how she has targeted students of Asian origin as her primary contacts to spread the news in support of the movement.

The above of attestations of participants leading to the findings in this study implied that BLM as racial justice movement represented an aura of the overall social justice study as case in point. Standing for justice in unison regardless of racial disparity that participants expressed during this study hinted to the moral imperatives that informed the undergraduate college student consciousness for civic engagement. The dual functions of the moral consciousness among undergraduate college students served to inform the students' activist mindset and promoted the students' moral development as an integral part of the essence of college education (Kohlberg, 1971).

College Student Protest Rallies and Activism as an Integral Part of Student Identity Formation

Being an undergraduate college student by going away from parental supervision for the first time in itself implied a new identity formation in the lives of college students (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). Because being a college student came with the freedom of dissenting against the

hitherto ruling paradigms at home. Ellsworth and Burns (2009), for example, referred to the experiences of higher education students dissenting or rioting against some restrictive religious orthodoxy on American campuses. Rudolph (1990) had a similar account of the history of college students dissenting against likewise restrictive theological practices.

The traditional student protests, riots or student movements were born out of dissenting views that demanded change. The contemporary student activism and civic engagements around multitudes of causes on or off campuses were also the continuation of the legacy of the traditional student movements. Biddix (2014) expressed that student activism on college campuses constituted the foundations of civic learning. Biddix (2014) further argued that student development could be fostered through dissenting that would lead to activism and civic engagement. Participants of this study asserted that activism has two aspects in their personal growth and development. For one, civic engagement is an arena where a student could exercise what they have learned in their extracurricular involvements and second such exercise would contribute to the student personal development. As an example, Lauren expressed her experiences about the need for having a dissenting view she has learned from her extracurricular sources and how it helped her grow:

> …In that like when you engage fully in activism, you're going to make mistakes, and that's a huge part of it too is that like being willing to accept those mistakes and like apologize if you think that that all came from my activism more than like any academic I like I love my studies, but I think my extracurricular involvement and my social justice work is like the biggest area of growth for me.

Most participants of this study concurred with the essence of being involved in activism and civic learning as an expression of freedom earned as a result of going away from their parents'

radar of surveillance. Civic engagement, essentially, included involvement in student organizations, clubs or fraternities that were tasked with organizing for different causes. Eventually, these roles fostered the process of a new student identity formation that is also known as student development in perspective. The participants' account of civic engagement by going away from parents' home, as an example, was expressed by Clair as follows:

> My family tends to be fairly conservative And as I've gone out of high school and into my undergraduate program. I've become more progressive. So, we don't see eye to eye on a lot of those issues. So, if I were to talk about at home, it wouldn't be looked upon as good…., In becoming liberated or getting personal freedoms are personal rights there, in turn, going to help me……, So, going to multiple rallies is a much better strategy for me as an activist than just hyper focus on one thing. And only doing what I want to do and helps me

In fact, Clair's response to the research question of what informed her social justice activism implied two things: For one, she indicated that her experience of racial justice activism or the movement was not a topic in her household while she was growing up. Second, Clair felt the freedom of discovering her own student identity after she left the family house and enrolled in college. There, she was at liberty to decide what to do or how to engage herself in the in the community of her college peers where she was able to embrace progressive ideals. This could be considered part of the student cognitive development and identity formation in social justice leadership. Kohlberg's (1971) account of student moral development would be attained through a cognitive inquiry as an integral part of human development and moral consciousness. The personal self-determination rights and the freedom Clair expressed in her statements was made possible by the fact of being an independent college student. The freedom earned by being on a

college campus also came with the freedom of intermingling with peers, engaging in extra-curricular activities, and joining student organizations or clubs that was the bedrock of college campus's politicizing potentials. One of the participants in this study, Madison, briefly described the restrictive nature of her parental home to explore more about what was going in the community:

> For me in high school, I didn't have much say and whether I could get involved or go to protest, because my parents are immigrants and so I grew up with a lot of rules in the household and I wasn't even allowed to go hang out with my friends. Even so, there wasn't much that I could do in high school.

As a core Finding of the study in this section, I would emphasize on the student's freedom to act on their own in their immediate aftermath of arriving on college campuses for the first time. The limited or non-existing freedom to be part of a protest rally or an activist movement before joining college gave no chance for an informed critical consciousness to act. Therefore, college campuses' potential to afford the freedom to act for the new undergraduate students was in line with the role higher education institution played in student identity formation. Then, this process of development informed the student activist's conscious for civic engagement which constituted further milestone for illuminating the research question of what informed college student activism or civic engagement and how college campuses had served as a platform for being socially active.

Higher Education's Extra-Curricular Attractions and Undergraduate Students' Civic Discourses on Campus

Civic learning in higher education is an extracurricular program design that is incorporated in many of the higher education institutions' mission & vision statements (Carrie,

2016). College campuses that incorporated extracurricular learning models included their explicit intents for promoting civic learning as a vehicle for civic engagement in their strategic plans. Carrie (2016) has put more emphasis on the community college models of civic learning practices that were also adopted by majority of the higher education establishments in which curriculums in civic learning were integrated in the academic course requirements. Practically, there existed some practices of offering courses that served as the bases for redefining the importance of general education in the form of civic engagement and service learning to promote the student's critical thinking skills.

The student moral development that Kohlberg (1971) associated with the college students' ability in cognitive judgment could be argued that such cognitive development was attained through an engaged critical thinking model of civic learning. The service learning and sustainable development programs driven from extracurricular activities were adopted in the general education courses to promote civic engagement (Carrie, 2016). Activities such as community organizing and organizing for social justice rallies were the subsequent outcomes of such civic learning models and extracurricular activities on campus.

College student activists who participated in this study reiterated how their participation in different student organizations and student clubs on campus played significant roles in their growth to become student activists in various social justice campaigns including the BLM movement that constituted the core of this case study. Jeremy, for example, had reiterated how the 'students for justice and peace, a student organization he belonged to. was instrumental in shaping his thinking, eventually, persuading him to be a student activist for social justice. Lisa also mentioned a similar account of belonging to the same student organization that helped her decide to get involved in student activist movements organized by her fellow campus peers:

> ….Um, yeah, I would say on campus. There is a club called students for justice and peace and that club in particular is especially Active with any type of movement. A lot of clubs are active. It's different movements, of course, but that one has a lot of different movements that they're involved in. So, I was pretty involved there.

Furthermore, instances of service learning and democratic engagement as part of the targeted civic learning, immensely, influenced the college student activists' civic engagement described in the literature. A Participant of this study, Amy, reaffirmed her practical experiences in community engagement in her own words:

> I've done a lot of work with organizations who like I've worked with appetite for change…, So much work in like community building. And they do a lot with food justice and like food accessibility our good bright side produce. I don't know if you've heard of them through interviews, but I worked for them all last summer in North Minneapolis and ran farm stands weekly like four or five days a week. And so that was very tangible work, that was like guys yeah trained at getting paid for it was a mobilizing.

In addition, service learning may be manifested in the form community organizing or volunteering in community activities and by engaging in internships in different organizations that promoted social justice. Whitney, for example, narrated her experiences of how she was involved in social justice activism as a result of one incident, a reading in civic learning that introduced her to the predicaments of the Black citizens she explained as follows:

> When I started school, I guess I got slightly more into like social justice circles, my freshman year, and I took my English class I took happened to be reading black resistance. So that was a really good introduction to like structural racism in a way that I hadn't seen it before. And then I got to go on a civil rights study Tour Down to

> Mississippi and Tennessee over spring break of my freshman year and j term my freshman year I took a class in Cuba, actually, to that was race, gender, and wrote revolution. So. we kind of compare the US and Cuba. So my freshman year was really like scholarly and then my sophomore year I got more involved with students for justice and peace and started to go to protests more and get involved with like the electoral process, which I think kind of relates.

Whitney's exemplary narratives of her experiences and a step-by-step involvement into social justice activism very well concluded how extracurricular civic learning nurtured undergraduate college student activism on campus. Additionally, Whitney brought a new perspective regarding the importance of extracurricular engagement both nationally and internationally when she mentioned the civil rights tour in the south and her trip to Cuba. That was an integral part of civic learning and democratic engagement in social justice leadership. This thematic Finding rendered more meaning to the research question around what informed college student activism and how student activists engaged in social justice movements.

Higher education institutions that brought undergraduate college students together, arguably, inspired the students by exposing them to some extracurricular revolutionary ideals coupled with the revolutionizing effect of college's communal living arrangements in the process of learning (Noddings, 2016). According to Noddings (2016), learning is a participatory process communicated between a group of learners and the democratic order in which the learners communicate, a process, that would eventually lead to a convergence of ideas. Similarly, undergraduate college student activism was the result of the communication between groups of students with convergent views and common interests who pursued a just society by democratizing the essence of leadership (Klein, 2016). Concepts such as movements, protests,

demonstrations, and activism entailed elements of knowing through communication and implied some revolutionary dynamics in their origin as well as manifestation.

In the process of my conversation with participants of this study and the subsequent themes I was able to come up with, I was convinced that the participants were somehow inspired or influenced by revolutionary ideals engrained in them either through the storytelling, history lessons or from the realities of their contemporary societies. BLM, for example, was one of the instances that all the participants claimed to have directly or indirectly experienced as it was a contemporary grassroot racial justice movement. Revolutions occurred around the world either as an act of antagonizing an ism that was deemed unjust or promoting a counter ism regarded as a progressive system of desirable ideas that needed to be maintained (Arendt, 1977). The isms that Arendt (1977) was talking about included such terms as capitalism, socialism, fascism and totalitarianism among others, while the isms that attracted the contemporary student activists in their own words primarily included racism, sexism, ageism and ableism to name the few.

Among the themes that emerged from the research interview coding with contents of revolutionary ideals as mentioned by Arendt (1977) and Kivisto (2011), the following ones were worth mentioning: progressive ideology, liberation ideology, oppressive system, protest movements, social justice, middle class and blue collar, to name the few. Revolutions of all sorts in human history were guided by certain ideological world views, directed against oppressive systems in their own terms, were led by what the revolutionaries designated as progressive forces and carried out by means of protests, demonstrations or protracted social movements (Arendt, 1977; Kivisto, 2011).

Reminiscent of such empirical examples of how protesters, demonstrators or dissenters were informed of the phenomenon they were pulled in to dissent against, undergraduate college

students had also implied how some revolutionary ideals informed them to take part in student rallies, protests, or activism in their communities. Some have, explicitly, described these experiences when Clair, for example, narrated her experiences of a Native American reservation in South Dakota when she was first year undergraduate college student. Clair stated about her observations of a harmful project that was happening to the community and she related the harmful practices to the experiences of her middle class, blue collar family's position to such systemic injustices:

> In my first year of undergrad I was asked to go on a trip to South Dakota with a group called vision. And they do. They do work trips that are very similar to mission trips, but they don't have a religious tied to anything. And I was very critical of that efforts but I kind of disregarded that notion. Just because a lot of my friends are doing it. But in the end, it was very harmful to the community that we went to and kind of mentally and emotionally draining for me. Because I went to Native American reservation with other students and I was the only person of color and I was the only person from a middle class, blue collar family.

Faith also mentioned about the progressive ideals some of her student affairs officials were reflecting when lending hands to the student organizers on campus on different occasions. Whitney, among others, was more explicit about her national and international experiences of movements and revolutionary concepts early on. She went on a Civil Rights study tour in America's south and went as far as Cuba to learn more about the international aspects of social justice movements in the context of revolutionary ideals:

> And then I got to go on a civil rights study Tour Down to Mississippi and Tennessee over spring break of my freshman year and J-term. My freshman year I took a class in Cuba,

> actually, to that was race, gender, and wrote revolution. So, we kind of compare the US and Cuba. So, my freshman year was really like scholarly and then my sophomore year I got more involved with students for justice and peace and started to go to protests more and get involved with like the electoral process, which I think kind of relates.

Furthermore, Whitney spoke of movements in international and historical contexts of revolutions that informed her as an undergraduate college student to be involved in social justice activism in her community. Another participant, Amy, also pinpointed about the progressive ideals that people around her harbored as the sources of inspiration and encouragement for her involvement in justice movements:

> My participation in the movements that I've had it so hopeful like, it's very there's something so powerful. I think of just like community and like humans, uniting and being like, we stand for this. So, I think to be a part of that and experience that has certainly had some effect on my development of like understanding and understanding the world. Yeah, I would. I guess again, it, it has given me a lot of hope to for change and certainly like within our generation, like other students that I've met and just drive and their work ethic and like what they stand for to I think being on a university campus.

Evidently, progressive ideals, historical narratives of the human condition and hands-on experiences from their participation in contemporary social movements were appealing to undergraduate college students' methods of knowing or of being informed of the prevailing societal predicaments. That was what most participants of this research reflected on the effects of their learning through extracurricular engagements.

Multiculturalism, Racial Disparity, and Cooperation among Students of Convergent Ideologies

This study affirmed the pluralistic nature of college student civic engagement as the center of attraction for students of different racial, cultural, ideological and gender backgrounds. As stated in previous sections of this study, college had served as a platform for undergraduate students' to collectively dissent against policies that were perceived as being socially unjust. The dynamics of organizing on campus was an inclusive process that was open to all students of the institution where such organizing was taking place.

Even though, Black students took the lead in organizing for racial justice in this particular case of the BLM movement, White students rallied around the same cause as allies for the racial movement organized on campus and campaigned for around the off-campus communities. Ally activism is the primary example of the convergence of student activists from different race backgrounds. Some of the White participants of this study, explicitly, stated how systemic racism could be a menace for human progress. Therefore, White allies that joined the BLM movement along their Black peers were convinced of countering racism as a result of the ideological beliefs embedded in their progressive ideals. Lauren, a White Woman participant of the study, described the rational for involvement as an ally:

> Um, I feel like we definitely have a very important role, we as white people have an important role. In supporting what's going on. But I also feel like we've taken up enough space and have had enough leadership positions throughout history that it's kind of like We don't, we don't need to be the people talking all the time. We don't need to be the person leading it we can be there supporting and like listening to the voices that are actually directly affected by like things like police violence. Or systemic racism. So. I do think we have a really important role. But I don't think that role always has to be like the person leading the March or whatever.

Furthermore, the White students indicated how difficult it was to mention racial justice issues within their family circles before they were able to enroll in college. These students expressed their conservative upbringing, but they were able to spouse progressive ideals as soon as they landed on college campuses. This could be attributed to one aspect of the politicizing potentials of college campuses that was suited for bringing people of convergent views together. Lauren added more emphasis to the beginning of her awakening about racial justice as a White person:

> Yeah, this is actually kind of interesting. My parents are super conservative very traditional Catholics who are like really against class matter and So that was interesting for me coming to college and having to like, make that decision for myself. And I think the like the moral part of it for me was just I grew up one way my whole life thinking that like in my parents' house right now obviously with this by me, but thinking that like the most important thing was to like go to heaven and be a good person in, like, in the light of like Catholicism and I never felt like we talked very much about like privilege or racial identity or talked about the ways that other people have different experiences in the country that like my white family. And so as soon as I came to college. I had roommates that were different racial identities than me. I started hanging around people that had different identities united and so it was like late high school early college because I was homeschooled for a big part of my life and also went to private school that was very white. So, it was in late high school and then college that I was just around people who had different identities than me and therefore like forced to think about what their experience was like. So, for me it was just building empathy, I suppose, like the moral part was building empathy with people who experienced marginalization because of their race.

Additionally, college students with different cultural backgrounds such as students of immigrant parents shared similar ideals with their college peers who were not first-generation immigrants. Madison described the process for the beginning of her awareness around the topics of social justice movement after she joined college because she grew up in an immigrant where such issues were not discussed. Madison described her experiences of knowing about racial justice activism as follows:

> For me in high school, I didn't have much say and whether I could get involved or go to protest, because my parents are immigrants and so I grew up with a lot of rules in the household and I wasn't even allowed to go hang out with my friends. Even so, there wasn't much that I could do in high school. Even though I believed in the movement, but in college was really when I started to become mobilized, and I got involved with the student group on campus called feminist community. And then we I started learning more about like what I specifically could do to be active and to contribute to this community and for me it was a question of like……

Madison's attestation reaffirmed that differences in cultural or racial backgrounds did not deter her from being part college student activist movements as soon as she was able intermingle with her college peers of similar ideological persuasions. Luke, on the other hand, testified how the idea of fighting for human right was, instilled him while he was growing up. He mentioned that he was the son of an immigrant family whose parents fled their native East Africa due to political persecution. As a result, Luke, first-generation born in the U.S., grew up watching his parents and extended family members advocating for human rights in their country of origin. Luke eloquently described the experiences of his upbringing and how that experience aligned with his

ideals of joining social justice activism during college years along with peers regardless of whatever backgrounds his peers embraced:

> Yeah, I think it really started with my upbringing. A lot of my family, my parents, specifically, but their social network grew up fighting for equal rights fighting for human rights in the Oromo community. And that's something that's always been the background me, but as a student. I was seen as black right when I go into any social space, but specifically in 2016 there was a large massacre back in Ethiopia's Oromia region, and it really sparked for me to stop being a bystander and sort of engage more actively in the process of fighting for human rights.

Luke's accounts of his experiences added more emphasis to this piece of the Finding that students of different backgrounds who shared similar ideological ideals around social justice constituted the core of the undergraduate college student activist movements. Further, speaking to the race-based disparities in the students' experiences, Faith, for example, stated her experiences about how different her orientation was from the experiences of her White peers regarding what to do if she were to be pulled over by a Police officer:

> I thought everyone else that I was at the table I'm talking about the book with who are all white and they were all like really surprised by it because you know their parents never had a conversation with them about like what you should do when a cop pulled you over and there was never in these like very specific hard rules versus where I thought everyone was like told those things so it was like coming to college here really brought some perspective for me and thinking like oh you know not everyone has to be taught certain things you know that I just assumed that everyone experienced, or everyone learned and that's not the case.

The other participants also supplemented similar responses pertaining to their varied experiences but similar ideals as undergraduate college students in rallying around common causes. The question of what informed college student activism posed to participants with different backgrounds was centered around shared values in social justice which resonated with undergraduate college students' ideals. I believe, the responses added more knowledge to the understandings around the dynamics and essence of undergraduate college student civic engagement regardless of racial or cultural backgrounds.

Figure 1

The Graphic Description of the Relationships Between the Conceptualized Themes and the Sub-Categories

Summary

This study was about what informed undergraduate student activism on social issues they rallied around and how students experienced their activism during their involvement as college students. By getting involved in issues that mattered to them and their communities, student activists were able to garner substantial leadership experiences that they could put into practice in their potential leadership roles they were to assume after graduation.

Participants reaffirmed in the research interviews that they joined peers in the BLM rallies because they wanted to reflect on themselves in the context of their individual roles in their communities, but they could only do so in a framework of an organized group action, otherwise known, in the larger context, as social movements.

In the interviews conducted for this qualitative study, all of the participants described that their primary intent for participating in student activism was to demand change in the arena of racial justice in particular. Among the research participants, for example, Whitney explained her motives for participation in racial justice activism in order to change the existing unjust system she termed as ‘systemic racism’. Whitney added that she was informed about the prevalence of such systemic racism after she read the history of Black resistance. She further illuminated about her awakening to be more scholarly as she connected with a group of students for justice and peace where she consistently continued to be involved in more protests as well as campaigning for citizen participation in electoral process which she believed was one of the citizens’ instrumental wrights in changing the social system of marginalization.

Additionally, Participants of this study reflected on their experiences and conceptions of the human condition that informed the participants’ understanding of racial justice in different

ways. Some had been told by parents and family about the discriminatory law enforcement practices embedded in the Justice system itself beginning from their early school years and throughout high school. These were mainly participants who identified themselves as African American and people of color. The other participants who identified themselves as White or Caucasian indicated little or no exposure to the narratives of racial discrimination in law enforcement and other areas until after their late high school years or early college years. The common value between these two categories of participants based on what informed their social justice activism was the moral imperative that guided their student activist motifs.

The Findings of the study concluded that undergraduate college students arrived at college campuses with differing backgrounds of upbringings and experiences as well as from diverse racial and family backgrounds. It, therefore, could be argued that such diverse backgrounds had profound effects on what informed their activism and their resultant experiences including the decisions they made throughput their undergraduate years on campus. As part of exploring the deep-seated motifs of participants in social movements, this study examined the experiences of student activists from three different points of view. First, students protested the socio-political conditions that sustained an oppressive system as part of the critical assessment of the prevailing power structure. Second, students identified practices of unjust race relations that constituted a system of domination by a racially biased political class over the other group perceived as a racial minority. Thirdly, through dissenting and activism as a mechanism for growth, undergraduate college students attained cognitive and intellectual development during their formative years while in college. The next chapter will analyze the raw data and thematic Findings of this study with the relevant theoretical approaches that would best define the conclusive statements extracted from the data Findings.

CHAPTER 5: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The Theoretical Approaches Explaining the Findings as an Aura of Learning Through Critical Thinking

African American undergraduate students who participated in this study narrated their learning experiences about their history differently from the way their non-African American peers were taught. Learning that is embedded in ones' upbringing could profoundly shape the way one perceives or conceptualizes society as an adult. For African American students, the idea of racial segregation or racial injustice was simply part of their community's historical past and a daily routine present life experience.

According to most of the African American respondents, young undergraduate college students had a preliminary orientation about unjust social practices even before they joined college campuses. The awareness included the fact that college campuses were conducive platforms for getting involved in matters very dear to undergraduate students. The fact that they had an a priori knowledge about what was happening in their communities encouraged them to engage in student activism as soon as they joined college. The African American woman undergraduate student, Faith, for example disclosed that she has learned about the prevalence of unfair treatment of African American members of the community by police from her family members' experiences.

> Yeah so it definitely resonated like within my family and I would say like as I got older and so I came to college the … [university] was very different from where I'm from I'm from a super diverse like very like lower income high school and like [university] is very white and upper-class and I think it wasn't until I got to college that I realized that some

> things weren't normal like I for example I was in this book club for The Hate You Give and we were having a conversation when the book we were talking about like police brutality and certain things like in the book that you give and then the movie the dad like tells you like you know when the police officer cops like put your hands like on the on the dashboard like this this is what you do when a cop like you know you need to follow these rules when the cop pulls you over um and I was like you know and no one I thought everyone else that I was at the table I'm talking about the book with who are all white and they were all like really surprised by it because you know their parents never had a conversation with them about like what you should do when a cop pulled you over and there was never in these like very specific hard rules versus where I thought everyone was like told those things so it was like coming to college here really brought some perspective for me and thinking like oh you know not everyone has to be taught certain things you know that I just assumed that everyone experienced, or everyone learned and that's not the case.

The awareness of how communities in the vicinities of college campuses were affected, Faith added, attracted students with similar orientation to participate in student activism when they joined college campuses. African American students were informed through their pre-conceived knowledge about injustices in their communities coupled with their knowledge of family stories embedded in their upbringing. And these were the compelling conditions for the student activists to act in the interest of the need for changing unjust situations in the society.

The student activists' response to the predicaments of the African American members of the community subjected to systemic racism found an explanation in critical theory's conception of the human condition languishing under an oppressive system. Critical race theory speaks to

the same predicament to which a certain sector of the society is subjected based on race. Basically, CRT is an extension critical theory that emerged as a theoretical approach espousing critical theory's argument mainly concerning race relations as its major domain of operation.

Undergraduate college students who participated in student activism, student protests, or were involved in community support rallies when joining college campuses had always had some sort of predisposition to the history of racial injustices in their communities either through family members and/or family friends as well as some prominent community leaders in their localities. African American students cited parental narratives as their primary sources of information about the historical racial injustices in America. To this effect, an African American man student who just graduated, Jeremy, reiterated how he was first exposed to the knowledge about racial justice from family members' narratives about African American experiences in relation to the recurring unjust practices of law enforcement. The rationale for getting involved in social justice activism as narrated by Jeremy was rooted in his knowledge of the historical narratives, he grew up hearing.

> So, I would say that from personal observation and from being personally impacted … a lot of it comes down to having an inherent feeling that this isn't just about one person or about … the movement itself but I mean you're a part of it and … you just feel guilty if you're not able to be active. For once I started really getting involved I think … I was thinking of everything just in retrospect as to that was a brother and or sister of mine who was gunned down and slayed down by the police. I look at my other racial brothers and sisters as the family as extended family and so I just felt like if one of us is going through … a particular issue then all of us are affected by it and to people who may not agree with me on that I mean if you're a person of color and you see people who are being slain

> on the news constantly weekly you can't help but be motivated by that one way or another or feel it emotionally so you know the question that I had to ask myself was well what are you going to do about those feelings and emotions how are you going to be able to pursue action so I made that conscious decision when I came back … I matriculated from a school in Wisconsin and so right when I came back the … shooting of Jamar Clark happened and … I was dating somebody at the time who was cousins with him but also you know again after seeing it on the news being conscious of our nae history and African-Americans being targeted on a yearly basis and actually on a daily basis depending on where you are I just realized that I couldn't just sit idle.

Furthermore, children of immigrant parents who considered themselves first-generation students of color and African American first-generation students were among the participants whose means of learning about unjust social order was nurtured by the stories of their own parents. Some of these parents left their ancestral home countries due to repressive authoritarian systems that stifled freedom of speech, assembly, and the right to protest injustices. Some of the other parents reported being discriminated against due to their ethnic origin and were suppressed by the other ethno-national group that was at the helm of the state power.

This is true of some multi-ethnic societies particularly, in Africa and Southeast Asia. It was possible to conclude that race was not the only factor for discriminating or othering in our societies, but ethnicity was used as the basis for marginalization and alienation. For students who came from such family backgrounds, college would serve as a fertile ground to vent their anger against social injustices they have historically internalized growing up and the hands-on experiences in their communities when fellow young Black men were being reported, killed, or maimed by the police. I asked the 25-year-old African American man, Luke, who graduated

three years ago, how he was informed of BLM, and why he developed keen interest in social justice activism. He simply chronicled how and why his immigrant parents left their home country and how they got involved in building a vibrant immigrant community here in town to advocate for their people in their home country. Luke also added that he grew up watching how this small immigrant community was organizing human rights rallies and how they were venting their frustration by chanting different slogans. Luke, in his own words, described all these experiences of his upbringing that led him to join a student group when he enrolled in college.

> Yeah, I think it really started with my upbringing. A lot of my family, my parents, specifically, but their social network grew up fighting for equal rights fighting for human rights in the Oromo community. And that's something that's always been the background of me. But as a student I was seen as Black right? When I go into any social space, but specifically in 2016 there was a large massacre back in Ethiopia's Oromia region, and it really sparked for me to stop being a bystander and sort of engage more actively in the process of fighting for human rights.

Luke's accounts of his parents' experiences, his own exposure to a community that was actively engaged in human rights campaigns, and reports of brutalities from his parents' home country reinforced his rational for deciding to be part of the student led social justice activism on college campus as soon as he arrived on campus. It also raised his curiosity to inform himself more about the trending racial justice movements in and around campus as he, eloquently, narrated it.

> I'm familiar with Black Lives Matter. Just as a movement itself. More recently, I'm learning more about individuals who are involved, but when I first heard about it. It was through social media through Twitter campaigns. A lot of the rhetoric on the campus was kind of shifting towards social justice and doing different things to better the playing field

> for Black people specifically. So that was kind of my first exposure. That was hard. That was especially problematic for me because it happened in Falcon heights and when I first started at [university] I was over in the dorms in the … campus, which is [close] … and when I got the first clip of the video on Facebook, seeing how Philando's girlfriend was going on Facebook to show what was happening, how their kid was in the backseat … It was just heartbreaking just to see it. And we just kind of learn more and more about it. And we just felt horrible as a community. And it felt like we needed to continue to fight at that point. But that was when I really started understanding how terrible some of the videos that we're surfacing on social media could really be and how traumatic they can be.

Luke had connected the dots of his deeply entrenched knowledge of human rights in his upbringing and how he positioned himself to be informed on what was trending around his campus as well as his community.

Another 21-year-old woman undergraduate student, Madison, reiterated similar experiences of how children of immigrant families learned most of the issues around race relations and the essence of their subsequent social justice activism as a mechanism for altering the hegemonic status quo. Madison is a daughter of an immigrant family from Asia with Malaysian ethnicity and Chinese intonation, as she described her own ancestry. She also identified herself as a person of color and her reasons to advocate for racial justice was embedded in her upbringing as well. When asked about how she became informed on the rallies she was involved during her college years, Madison, elaborated:

> I first started hearing about it … in high school, yeah around high school is when you know the Trayvon Martin case occurred for me and a lot of other young Black boys are

> being killed, Eric Garner and all these names started popping up. And that's when I first started really getting aware of the Black Lives Matter movement and mostly through social media as well because a lot of people were posting about it on Instagram and Facebook. And I know that they've been around for longer than that. But for me, that's when I first started hearing about it was through social media. When I was in high school and when the news broke out … about Eric Garner and, all these other young Black men, and that was that was really what triggered for me trying to like understand you know, what exactly was the Black Lives Matter movement so. For me in high school, I didn't have much say and whether I could get involved or go to protest, because my parents are immigrants and so I grew up with a lot of rules in the household and I wasn't even allowed to go hang out with my friends. Even so, there wasn't much that I could do in high school.

While Luke expressed how he actively learned a lot about social justice activism, Madison did not say much about her parents' story of how they left their country of origin. Madison, in fact, hinted how strict her parents were may be because of their own past experiences of violence and their strictness could be attributed to being protective of their children.

Yet, both Madison and Luke, were a very well like-minded undergraduate students in their stances towards student activism for racial and social justices. To be like-minded is the essence of becoming a group of activists as undergraduate college students in higher education setting. Madison's explanation further implied that she was conscious of her role as an activist as she argued why she did not consider herself an organizer but an advocate.

> I have not played any organizing roles in my opinion. I've done some advocacy roles, I would say, like, so I go to protests and I show up, you know, to meetings and that kind of

> stuff I actively call my representatives, I'm sending emails. And posting about it on social media. I'm inviting other people into the movement as well to get involved. And then I also have kind of created my own ways of engaging people based off of the Black Lives Matter movement. So, I created a series called dear Asian America on my Instagram, it's a conversation that is that I hold between myself and two of my friends from high school. And they also went to [university] as well. But we talked about, you know, specifically how Asian Americans fit into the Black Lives Matter movement because I think it's really important that we like I'm using my privilege to reach out to people who look like me and try to engage them in the movement because it's like having, having a White person, for example, or having an Asian American person, for example, like, try to tell a White person, "Hey, you should really be involved in the Black Lives Matter movement" just doesn't have the same effect. If an Asian American were to tell another Asian American, "hey, I really think that you should join this movement because there's just something about someone who looks like you and who's standing for movement" and you know you think to yourself, "Okay, well, if they look like me. And they're involved with this movement, maybe I can be involved with this movement, too." So, I've been trying to use my privilege in that sense. It's not directly linked to the official Black Lives Matter movement at all, but I am just doing what I can in relation to help the movement and spread the word and spread awareness.

Madison referenced the various information dissemination efforts she has made and how she has targeted students of Asian origin as her primary audience. Madison's reference to students of Asian origin on campus as her primary domain of operation in her activism might have been influenced by her subconscious in a historical sense of belongingness. One could also conclude

that Madison might have been taught more about her parents' history growing up even though she did not bring it up during the research interview out of personal reservation.

In conclusion, historical accounts of an individual could also be understood in terms of a cumulative phenomenology of experiential learning over a period of time. History is also a cumulative narration of human experience that could be theorized through the empirical process of knowing. Responding to the question of how they were informed about social justice issues they rallied around as undergraduate college student activists, students of African American origin or students of color reflected on the stories they were told growing up in their families as well as from the history of unfairness and inequality many had to endure in this country. This shows how powerfully informative history has always been and reaffirms the power of storytelling, especially, in terms of family, race, and class narratives.

Critical Analysis of the Findings and the Existing Empirical Evidence

In an effort to protest against social injustices that characterized the human conditions within the societal relations for centuries, the informed, tenacious, and committed individuals organized campaigns waged over a longer period of time which were to be known as social movements (Isaac et al., 2020). The critical analysis of the human condition and protesting against the social ills rooted in the hegemonic practices of a certain social strata by the other constituted the basis of critical theory (Horkheimer, 1972) that remained the theoretical masterpiece of studying social movements in different forms. Social movements, conceptually, denoted all forms of dissenting against a certain system of domination anywhere in the world and had remained an instrument of organizing for a just society, internationally. The resolve or commitment to participate in a movement for social change, primarily, emanated from learning or an epistemological knowledge about the state of things (Isaac et al., 2020).

Noddings' (2016) explanation of the rational for educating the youth or generation of students as a means of nurturing critical thinkers and future leaders aligned with the very argument that it is the critically thinking learned mind that discerns the morally good or bad value orientations in society. Participants of the research interview for this study reflected on the rationale for their civic engagement to have emanated from the very idea of knowing, questioning (thinking critically), and committing to promote a just society by challenging what is perceived as unjust. Knowing and critically thinking alone, according to Noddings (2016), would not lead to doing what is just because there were many historical instances in which the learned had devised evil venues in the society. Any intent of a deploying nuclear arsenal in conflicts, for example, could not be viewed as a good thing, let alone the very invention of the nuclear armament from a moral perspective.

Contrary to the potentials for the unwise use of a learned mind in the society, the morally developed critical thinkers reminiscent of college students for social justice activism represented the good moral judgment of a learned thinker for a just cause (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), extensively, argued the moral development aspect of intellectual curiosity as a continuum of cognitive development earned through education. It is the realm of the morally developed cognitive mind to make moral judgments about good and evil, only to do what is good for the society. A student's civic engagement on a college campus would immensely contribute to student's moral development, according to Kohlberg's theory (1971, 1977).

The analysis of the data as structured in the following subheadings was based on the responses of the research interview participants which aligned with the theoretical presumptions used to analyze the findings in this study. Additionally, other empirical factors informing student

activism for social justice were included in this analysis section as they appeared to be appealing to the student activists' intellectual curiosity informing the rational for participating in civic engagement on campus. The essence of education as argued by Noddings (2016), and the cognitive judgment of the educated mind as theorized by Kohlberg (1971, 1977) as well as Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), for example, aligned with the testimonies of the research participants that intellectual curiosity and the need for inquiring for more knowing were among the drives for participating in student activist rallies. Seeking justice for the unjust human condition, the natural consequence of activism as an art self-expression and intellectual development as a process of the overall college student development are among the topics discussed in the analyses below. The organization of the subheadings were not, necessarily, sequentially arranged but all of the topics referenced to the raw data from the responses of the participants and from the systematically organized data into themes as they fitted in each section. The following subheading which is the subject cognitive sphere in the process of learning seemed to hold a logical first place in the sequence of analyzing how inquisitive curiosity contributed to an informed decision to act or become a student activist in higher education.

Intellectual Curiosity and Critical Thinking

With this prelude into the analysis of the undergraduate student activism, which is the focal point of this study, I argue that learning has shaped student development through participation in student protests, rallies, and eventually leading up to an activist identity in social justice leadership. As argued by Isaac et al. (2020), participation in a movement for social change is, fundamentally, the biproduct of an informed and a learned mind. The epistemological process of positing to the prevalence of a social disequilibrium as a way of creating knowledge critically assesses the prevailing oppressive condition and calls for a restructuring of the society

for change (Abes, 2016; Gardner, 2009). As it was overwhelmingly the case that student activists rallied for social justice inspired by what they learned about the injustices taking place in their communities, Whitney, in particular highlighted how her curious and inquisitive attitude guided her to be involved in the BLM as she reiterated her experiences of going on a civil rights tour to Mississippi and Tennessee during her first year:

> I got to go on a civil rights study tour down to Mississippi and Tennessee over spring break of my freshman year … I took a class in Cuba, actually, to that was race, gender, and wrote on revolution. So, we kind of compare U.S. and Cuba. So my freshman [year] was really like scholarly and then my sophomore year I got more involved with students for justice and peace and started to go to protests more and get involved with like the electoral process which I think kind of relates.

Whitney's statements clearly indicated a development curve beginning with her initial inquiry about America's South, then going as far as Cuba and comparing it with the United States and being involved in other engagements with fellow students in her department. Whitney, explicitly, referred to the academic basis for her knowing during her first year and described how her involvement in activism took an upward curve through time.

Such intellectually disciplined process of conceptualizing a given information is a thinking skill otherwise known as critical thinking that forms the epistemological basis of knowledge creation. Knowing, and the collective act of getting organized to effectuate social change that is embedded in student learning, arguably, could lead to an individual student's self-discovery in terms of ones' own place in the society (Abes, 2016). As a continuum of the historical social movements and its transformation after the landmark Civil Rights era movements, college students continued the tradition of protesting on campus as an integral part

of college life (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Austin, 1975). This formed the core of undergraduate college student activism that was intertwined with an epistemological process of knowing, as a moment of self-defining intellectual curiosity or personal development and eventually the moral obligation or duty one was supposed to discharge in the society. The idea of a student activist's participation in a movement could, therefore, be explained with three major theoretical approaches rooted in critical theory, critical race theory (CRT), and student development theory.

Traditional undergraduate college students fall within the age range that directly comes from high school. As a result, their personal experiences of knowing through critical analysis would vary based on their age maturity. To be precise, the level of the students' acritical analysis skills during their high school years may vary from their level of understanding after they enrolled in college. Student activism was informed by the cumulative of information they had absorbed starting from their grade school years spanning through their college tenure. Hence, it is important to review the student activists' terrain of knowledge before and after their high school years based on the information they provided during the interview, and that led them to be involved in college student activism.

Pre-College Experiences

The findings in this study revealed that young undergraduate college students had a preconceived orientation about unjust social policies even before they joined college campuses. Faith and Jeremy shared their pre-college experiences of how social ills were perceived and taught to them by their respective families. Both participants decided to take on the challenges of getting involved in rallies around racial justice causes as soon as they landed on college premises. Based on their experiences of what they were taught growing up, the issue of racial justice was the dearest to these two participants. The students acquired knowledge about the

social inequality and racial injustices from their parents before their college years. Students also had the opportunity to learn about the unfair systems from their communities, even during their pre-college years. The fact that they had an a priori knowledge about what was happening in their communities encouraged them to engage in student activism as soon as they joined college. One of the participants, Jeremy, for example disclosed that he has learned about the prevalence of unfair treatment of African American members of the community by police from his own family members' experiences through personal narratives.

I used intertwined theories to explain the findings of this study. Max Horkheimer's (1972) Critical Theory was distinguished from a traditional theory for its distinctiveness and its practical purposes of seeking human emancipation best described how student activists embarked on seeking a just society through their actions of organizing for social justice. Most of the participants clearly indicated their intent for engaging in or organizing for social causes for the goal of attaining human freedom. When asked about the moral guidance that persuaded students to get involved in racial justice activism as an ally, Whitney expressed that protesting against a "deeply constructed anti-Blackness into laws and policies" was the bare minimum she could have done to be involved in what she described as liberation movement.

Horkheimer's (1972) critique of the human condition and the need to liberate human beings from the conditions that enslaved them, emerged in connection with many social movements that identified the various dimensions of dominations and hegemonies in modern societies. Similarly, student activism, as part of the broader tradition of student movements and protests since the inception of higher education institutions, falls within the parameters of critical theory as espoused by Horkheimer's critique of the human condition and the imperatives for emancipation.

Second, as part of the critique of the overall human condition, CRT first emerged as a movement by a group of scholar activists later developed into a critical study of transforming the human relations in terms of race, racism, and power (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Additionally, Delgado and Stefanic (2001) reiterated the essence of CRT that directed its critic against the American legal system. Its origin goes back to the work of the Civil Rights era legal scholars of the 1960s that became instrumental in the intervention activism by students of color to challenge the color-blind liberal legal practices (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). As an integral part of the critical theory discussed earlier, CRT encompasses some dimensions of activism in which it, not only attempts to understand or critique structural racism that was legitimized by legal system but also strives to change it. Based on the findings of this study also, participants of the study had a preliminary orientation about how people were treated differently because of their skin color. The understandings of these participants were not as thorough as what they had learned after the joined college campuses. Some of the non-Black participants recounted their memories of maltreatments of the Black citizens by White law enforcement officers when they were in high school. The other participants of African American origin reiterated the stories of racial discrimination and systemic racism narrated to them by their parents or family members growing up early on. Yet, the liberation ideology remained the common denominator of all participants regardless their racial identities.

Post-Admission Experiences as College Students

As one of the participants reported, she was startled by the disparities between White and Black families' teachings regarding how they prepared their children for being pulled-over by law enforcement officers. Black children were told to be obedient at all times if they were pulled over for any traffic violations. The participant, who identified herself as Black woman and

sophomore at the university, expected that her White classmates had a similarly shared experiences around the concept of policing. But she found the experience to be otherwise when they met at a book club on campus as she reported the encounter to her White friends. She described her experience as shocking and it had become one of the underlying factors for this participant to get involved in the BLM movement as a student activist. Critical race theory, therefore, superbly explains why and how students of color in particular became an integral part of student activism on and off campus in the attempt to improve race relations and equal treatment of citizens of all races. Even though, Black and White participants had different experiences before their college years, the latter were encouraged to campaign for racial equality the same way their Black peers were demanding justice under the same social identity as undergraduate college students.

The third theory, student moral development theory, describes college students' cognitive development as a human development continuum including how students grow intellectually and interpret the world around them (Abes, 2016; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). It is an important theoretical approach that best explains how student activists shape their potentials as leaders during their formative years while in college. For example, one of the findings of this study was that one of the participants of this study, Jeremy was able to identify the right field of study that could prepare him for social justice leadership. Subsequently, he decided to transfer from the institution he first enrolled to the second one where he was able to enroll in a social justice focused field of study that resonated with his needs. The student had clearly identified his needs in the context of student identity development and a future role he envisaged in social justice leadership.

Summary of the Theoretical Tools in Reflecting on the Findings

Horkheimer's (1972) Critical Theory laid down the philosophical and ideological bases for social movements for justice while student activism remained the integral part of the overall movement for social justice. Undergraduate college students were involved in activism because of their orientations around the prevalence of injustice in the society they learned about before and during their college years. Critical race theory, as a critique of the legal system defining race relations, explained the racial components of injustices and the need to change hegemonic system based on race and racial discrimination. Ultimately, students prepared themselves by dissenting against the unjust system of domination that found a salient explanation through moral development theory.

Students learn from history either through formal classroom settings or through storytelling. Narratives are powerful mediums that would awaken a critically thinking mind. The concept ally activism also needs more emphasis in the context of seeking justice as universal value so that members of the privileged group of the society closes rank with the marginalized group in service of social justice. As a way of further elaborating allyship between difference, I also add the essence of intersectionality and cooperation to further elaborate how instrumental critical race theory would help to understand the intersectionality of identities which cooperate in social justice movements. In short, the following three sections were intended to be an extension of the theorical analysis of the findings by adding more perspectives to additional sources knowledge earned through critical analysis of information students absorbed in due course of time. These topics include: the awakening power of storytelling, allyship and ally activism, and intersectionality and cooperation.

The Awakening Power of Storytelling for Activism

Social movement theorists argued that change seeking movements always depended on committed and determined individuals organized as a group or team and those individuals with such an enduring resolve were products of a dynamic enculturation or a transformational social learning (Isaac et al., 2020). There are different mediums of learning in a way that knowledge is created through lived experiences in an extensive period of time and these experiences illuminate the essence of human history. It is the historically and chronologically narrated experience that constitutes the art of knowing through storytelling. Teaching history to students as a specific social science discipline and narrating historical events to someone may vary because the latter has more visible human emotions and expressions garnered through lived experiences that would make storytelling more powerful.

Storytelling had a particular significance in racial justice teachings, simply, because the narratives of the historical facts that are embedded in the unjust race relations could invoke emotions with a lasting learning experience (Bell, 2010). African American college students described their methods of learning about racial injustices through the stories narrated to them by their parents or family members even before they enrolled in college. Those who had opportunities to learn through such narratives or storytelling were very much involved in student activism for social justice during their undergraduate years. Even the non-African American participants of this study admitted they were very much touched by the stories they were told pertaining to race relations or racial injustices in American society. They reported having decided to be part of a movement for racial justice as a result of the awareness they acquired through the storytelling as a learning experience. It had an awakening impact for the college undergraduate students' participation in student protests, rallies, and eventually student activism.

The White undergraduate college students attested the stories they have been told or the narratives about racial injustices they had encountered through storytelling motivated them to read more about the historical accounts of race relations in America and persuaded them to participate in emancipatory student movements.

Nash and Viray (2013) reiterated about the liberating power of storytelling and as an intellectual instrument of self-actualization. Telling or narrating ones' own story is a very powerful emotional and cognitive self-reflection within the parameters of historical perspectives and contemporary social realties. Self-reflection is an integral part of personal experience narrated by the self but in the context of the society one is part and parcel of. The undergraduate students who participated in this study reflected on their own experiences when responding to why and how they were involved in student activism during their undergraduate years. They told their stories and they reflected on the stories they were told as part of their learning experiences. Bell (2010) further illuminated the power of storytelling in making meaning out of the prevailing social reality and it is the critical thinking around the social reality that would lead to the action toward changing the existing system of oppression. That was what participants of this study reflected as the imperatives for their decisions to participate and get involved in a movement that mattered to them.

Allyship and Ally Activism

Generally, allies are individuals who collaborate in social justice work with members of the oppressed sector of the society with the goal achieving freedom for the oppressed while allies themselves maintain privilege as a result of belonging to the dominant sector of the society (Bell, 1997; Broido, 2000). Allyship in racial justice refers to ally activism in which White individuals volunteer to support Black people's demand for racial equality. Ally activism, therefore, is an act

of commitment by non-Blacks to march in solidarity with people subjected to racial discrimination and, hence allyship is a realm of social justice activism. Historically, the first organized ally activism that White individuals publicly marched alongside Black folks who demanded racial justice was seen during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s (Orum, 1970). An ally is a person with the social privilege and power who is committed to the realization of social equity by getting involved in movements that would elevate the status of the less privileged and marginalized. Allyship, hence, is a process in which the privileged sector of the society sympathizes with the causes of the marginalized members of the society and align with the actions of the later in their demand for changing the oppressive condition.

As I have explained in the historical background of student movement since the days of the Civil Rights movement, a number of White student activists had marched alongside their Black peers protesting racial discrimination as an oppressive human condition that needed to be dismantled (Orum, 1970). Ally activists, usually, associated themselves with the group that was perceived as the disadvantaged within the prevailing social system by positioning themselves from the point of view of the privilege they held and by devising what they could do from there to change conditions of the marginalized (Vern, 2017). According to Vern (2017), an ally activist identity might have emerged through the process of the positionality that an ally was taking around the idea of emancipation as a common good. In this context, both privilege and marginalization ought to be understood as experiences within different social and cultural settings, not as absolute or constant values. The reason could be explained in terms of one of the three models of social justice ally identity development (Edwards, 2006).

Keith Edwards (2006) identified self-interest, altruism, and social justice ally models as the underlying deriving forces that guided the motif for allyship in social justice movements.

According to Edwards (2006), being an ally for self-interest was driven by acts of being protective while altruism was considered more of an act of favoritism (i.e., doing something good for others as a good thing), while for the third model (i.e., being an ally for social justice) was driven by the idea of the universality of liberation as a common good for the privileged as well as the marginalized alike.

Out of the three models discussed above, the data collected from participants of this study illuminated the motif of those from the privileged sector of society for being part of the racial justice activism of the BLM movement to be that of an ally for social justice. In terms of the racial composition out of the 10 participants of this study, six identified themselves as White with two of the six being mixed race. These non-African American ally activists explicitly stated their activism was mainly driven by the idea of liberating the oppressed and the oppressor by the same token so that freedom could reign, indiscriminately for all (Freire, 2005, 2000). In his pedagogy of the oppressed, Paulo Freire (2000) argued that for freedom to reign in eternity, not only the oppressed but also the oppressor must be free from its acts of oppressing. It was rooted in the consciousness of the ally activists whose motif it was to act as ally for social justice to completely do away with the oppressive human condition in all of its forms.

The “ally for social justice model” as described by Edwards (2006) also coalesced with the theoretical argument of critically assessing the oppressive human condition and the need for eradicating the system of oppression, which was a philosophical approach, embedded in the emancipatory essence of critical theory. None of the non-Black allies for social justice who participated in this study described their motifs to be driven by favoritism or self-interest as though they were doing their allyship for the stated purpose of rescuing or protecting their friends, classmates, or anyone of their acquaintances from the target population but principled by

the ideology of universal emancipation. This study further identified how the marginalized and the privileged member participants were distinctively informed of their activism and the two groups' awakening pertaining to the social predicaments in the arena of racial justice.

Participants of this study who identified themselves as African Americans or students of color narrated their experiences around the stories of racial inequality and unfair policing practices directed against Black citizens. For them, it started from their childhood through their high school years until they themselves were, eventually, able to comprehend the scope of racial injustice when they joined college. These African American participants added that the stories of racial inequality and unfair treatment of Blacks were part of the stories they were told growing up by their parents and family members. Additionally, these stories were told to children of African American origin, not just for the sake of storytelling alone but as part of an advisory note to them to be extraordinarily obedient to the demands of law enforcement in any instance of a traffic stop or to abide by any demand during policing routines. White participants of this study, on the other hand, did not mention any such experiences and their awakening to be an ally activist was informed, rather, by what they themselves had witnessed as unfair in the general public or through their own readings at times during their late high school years or at the time of their early under graduate years in college, partly from their college peers.

The above discussion implied the prevalence of a dichotomous relationship between the phenomenological process informing the potential student activists from both the privileged and marginalized races and the process of socialization into their respective social milieus. The Black students were informed of their activism from their immediate social networks (i.e., their parents or family members) their primary social connections the students were socialized into. This social network of parents and family members were the primary informants of the African

American students about racial injustice. The White participants of the study, on the contrary, were not informed about racial inequality from their parents or family members. They, rather, learned about it from the general public and through readings that influenced their informed decision.

Respondents clearly described how they were first informed of the unequal race relations in the society and the distinctive experiences of their sources. The difference in the way they learned about racial justice reflected an asymmetrical divide along racial categories as White and non-White with the corresponding stratification of the privileged ally activist and the target population of oppression, otherwise known as the marginalized identity. Discerning how the racial constellation in undergraduate student activism on campus and how alliances are being formed are vital components of knowing their students for professionals of student affairs in higher education.

Furthermore, as ally for racial justice activism emerged from the dominant and privileged White students on campus, other forms of allyship could be formed depending on the nature of the social justice causes activists were pursuing to rally around. An example of such agendas around social justice could be an issue of gender equality where women were viewed as marginalized while men were considered the dominant or the privileged sector of the society explained in terms of the asymmetric gender relation. Men of both Black and White races could be allies of women of either races in activism or a movement for gender equality. There is an intersecting dynamic here in a way that Black men who were, otherwise, considered the oppressed in the arena of racial justice appear to be the dominant male sector of the society in the oppression of women of all races. Even though a theoretical or empirical argument around the phenomenon of intersectionality is not the scope of this study, I found an imperative for briefly

discussing how intersectionality changes the constellation of ally formation in various forms of social justice activism in the next section because understanding how allyships form on college campuses would foster the understanding of student civic engagement patterns for professionals of student affairs.

Intersectionality and the Theoretical Basis for Cooperation

The concept of intersectionality was first used in the field of legal studies and attempted to describe the unique layers of oppression Black women face in the legal profession (Crenshaw et. al., 1995). The concept was meant to uncover such realities as the unity of different identities and the differences within similar identities as well. In its original content, intersectionality of identities denoted the privileges or advantages that one might face based on those identities that overlapped at times. An example of the intersection of oppression based on multiple identities is revealed in the oppression of a black because her racial and gender identity at the same time. Commonalities of a similar gender identity that Black and White woman share could be the basis for forging alliances in the fight against gender discrimination. Both races could be discriminated against as Women or become subjected to sexual violence by the opposite gender. Yet, the White woman would have more privileges in another social setting that considers racial category as a measure of assigning privilege or disadvantage. Class would be another example in which members of the working class, regardless of their race, could be subjected to undesirable working conditions or insufficient compensations for their labor. In this situation also, the intersectionality of class that represented the same social category based on labor relations or economic status may disappear if the social categorization changes from class to race or gender.

The compelling argument of the analogy of intersectionality in the context of ally activism is to paraphrase how intersecting common identities potentially cooperate to dissent

against their converging negative predicaments as one social identity. Women of all color may cooperate, for example, to do away with discrimination or violence against Women in general. It is also possible that White women could be an ally of Black Women who may be discriminated because of their race. The alliance may not reflect the intersection of identities dwelling in the same person as conceptualized in the theory of Intersectionality, but the common gender identity still enhances cooperation between Women of different races. Similarly, the participants of this study had implied that White ally student activists joined racial justice movements alongside their Black peers with an implicit motif of solidarity for the Student identity that all undergraduate students shared. I would argue that the White ally activists who joined racial justice activism would potentially align with movements around gender equality as well. Allyship could, therefore, be conceived out of the consciousness of sharing similar predicaments due to intersecting but distinct identities at times. To put things into perspective, I will briefly discuss the overall social justice context of intersectionality that was first used in the feminist theoretical argument.

The intersectionality of gender and race that also determines the social privilege one belongs to, manifests itself by the level of consciousness that a member of a social class appears to harbor. Even though, feminism as a movement is usually attributed to the educated white women, women of color and other races also equally embrace the movement based on their level of education and awareness. Gender oppression is a common denominator for all but the racial disparity between White and Black women adds more burden to black women's fight against injustices, inequity and inequality. Education, therefore, is the key instrument that the disadvantaged women of all races used as a leverage in their awakening and their engagement for justice. Education as the structural paradigm that elevated women's position in the society in

general and in the workforce in particular played a pivotal role in uplifting women's prestige (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005).

John R. Thelin (2011) provided a brief account of the early educational institutions in the United States that enhanced women's participation in higher education. According to Thelin (2011), women specific institutions such as college, academy, female seminary and literary institute, to name the few, were widespread by the 1860s. The conservative elements of that contemporary society who viewed women's education as an undesirable practice, even went as far as embracing the expanding educational opportunity for women. These conservative elements at times struggled with how far women should go in pursuit of education and what types of disciplines they should be taught while consenting to the idea of extending access to education for women. Thelin (2011) further described the expansion of women education as of the 1850s as the distinguishing features of American higher education:

"Expanding higher Education for women, usually seen as an extremist activity, received an unexpected boost from the fears of conservative constituencies." (Thelin, 2011, p84)

The historical timetable in the expansion of women enrollment in higher education that is described above coalesced with the first wave in the feminist movement (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). This reaffirmed the hypothetical presupposition that education serves as a key instrument in social engagement or emancipation in the form of resistance or awakening that the early feminists used as a leverage in launching the movement. This, in essence, was an art of activism that resonated with undergraduate student activist phenomenon described in this study.

The functionalist paradigm of gender as a social construct has been used to assign functions in the society and created the gender disparity between men and women (Hesse-Biber, & Carter, 2005). In this paradigm, women were raised with defined expectations of what they

ought to be and what functions they needed to assume in the society after a certain age regardless of each woman's racial identification.

The feminist movement that started as a race neutral phenomenon developed into racially identifiable women's predicament in the society. Black women had to endure double oppression because of their race and gender. Among the various categories of feminist movements, women of color started their own Black feminist movement (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). Born out of the Civil Rights movement era, Black feminism was simply an expression of the multiple identities of a woman that also brought a multitude of social judgments along with it. Both women of Color and White women alike were subjected to challenges that gender specific roles had to impose on them. Women of Color again have additional chances of being exploited because of their race. The Black narrative presupposes that achieving racial equality is an important milestone for women's freedom as well (Thandi Sulé, 2011).

As Black feminist movement gained momentum and took root to a certain level, the emphasis on the importance of education was seen liberating when more African American or women of Color became more visible in higher education institutions. According to Thandi Sulé (2011), black women who joined white dominated institutions of research made a conscious and informed decisions knowing the challenge it entailed: "… that the participants encountered subtle and blatant forms of racism. However, race consciousness served as a catalyst for insurgency and institutional transformation." (Thandi Sulé, 2011, p. 147)

This, superbly, explained as to why race conscious feminist movement was also important in attaining race and gender equality. There were, of course, unintended consequences of embarking on such adventure because challenging the status quo could have resulted into dismissals or draining the numerical strength of women activists by attrition. But the intent of

taking such risk calculated the long-term gain that it was going to bear fruits in the struggle for social justice. In summary, human history has recorded multifaceted movements for social justice in different forms. People organized themselves based on their perceived social categories such as race, gender, class, culture, language, sexual orientation and so on. Protests, movements and activism were the resultant forms of organizing for social justice while constellations of allyship emerged out of such dynamism that was reflected in the undergraduate student ally activism on higher education premises.

One more thing I, thought, would invoke a new theoretical debate in the arena of college student activism would be a paradigm shift in the area of organizing social justice activism or the overall dynamics of social movements, for that matter. The way students organize college student activism in the new cyber era would influence the mechanism of learning, the patterns of acting and eventually how the analysis such Findings could be explained. Hence, I was convinced that it is worth touching on the new paradigms of a virtual organizing and movements with subsequent potential debates around paradigmatic shifts.

A New Paradigm in Organizing

Empirical evidence in the literature review indicated the internet age and cyber technology opened a new chapter regarding the dynamics of organizing social movements (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017; Glenn, 2015). The change seeking student activism in the internet age has created a virtual society of networks that rallied for common goals (Alcides & Robert, 2015). The modern age of communication has eased an unrestricted flow of information in which social media outlets such as emails, tweets and Facebook pages reported unvetted events taking place in the wider society. The traditional media reporting that was relatively vetted and restricted in scope gave way to a free flow of news and events so that the inquisitive mind could

filter or inquire the truth to adhere to. Hence, social media impacted the pace and structure of organizing like-minded individuals around a common goal among student activists on the same campus or across campuses with a potential reach out to the community as well (McKeon & Gitomer, 2019). Another transformational power of the cyber media and its shifting paradigm could also be attributed to the possibility that people could virtually protest, even, by maintaining their anonymity (McKeon & Gitomer, 2019). This does not mean, though, that the social issues student activists rallied around or the leadership in the movement would remain anonymous because activism involved a clearly identified social problem and a certain center of gravity hinting to who may be the leading circle.

The cyber platform would allow observers to experience the authentic feelings of participants since it could guarantee anonymity so that people could vent their anger, frustrations or indignation with impunity including the use of whatever language of profanity they wished. Simply put, cyber communication could increase participation, enhance organizing and increase the spectrum of the reach out of a project of student activism, or even any type of social movement, for that matter (Alcides & Robert, 2015; McKeon & Gitomer, 2019).

Additionally, citing some international examples of how the modern age of cyber communication had revolutionized protest movements around the world or globalized revolutions, would be of paramount importance. Undergraduate student activism localized around the case of BLM may be understood as a microcosm of the international framework of change seeking movements. The most notable social media driven event of a revolutionary upheaval led by students and community activists that succeeded in effecting regime changes in parts of northern Africa was the revolution that was known as the Arab Spring (Breuer et al., 2015; Khondker, 2011). The Tunisian revolution of late 2010 and early 2011 was an empirical

example of how the cyber technology or social media networking had played a unique role in mobilizing dissent against an authoritarian regime, which otherwise would have been impossible before the internet age. The same was true for what had happened in Egypt's major cities along the Nile Delta in which hundreds of thousands gathered at Cairo's main square, for example, within short period of time during the Arab Spring revolutions (Khonder, 2011).

Coming back to the role social media played in organizing student activism around the BLM movement, participants of this study stated they have used Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to disseminate the news of upcoming protest rallies to their acquaintances as well as to the public. It made organizing easier than the traditional means of communicating such announcements through flyers, notice boards, or word of mouth. The BLM movement itself, first emerged as hashtag movement on Twitter in conjunction with the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder case of the Black teenager, Trayvon Martin in Florida (Banks, 2018). In fact, Banks (2018) emphasized that social media campaign played a vital role in organizing around the Trayvon Martin case, while the traditional news media down played the facts of this particular case in Florida by exaggerating the narratives of the mainstream society as opposed to the victim's perspectives. Banks (2018) further argued that major news media had sided with the dominant sector of the society to justify racial violence as a function of governance while problematizing the behaviors of the victims.

Social media as an alternative for organizing, therefore, has revolutionized protest movements in general and student activism in particular, as it had been the case in organizing support and attracting allies in the BLM movement to date (Clark, 2019). The anonymity that social media could guarantee might contribute to more allies participating in support of racial justice causes similar to that of BLM. Clark (2019) added that BLM was a racial justice

movement that was fueled by social media campaigns while it succeeded in attracting more White allies in support of the movement. Participants of this study who considered themselves ally activists attested to the fact that social media had eased their ally activism in the BLM movement on their campuses and their communities.

In conclusion, social media had transformed organizing for social justice as a tool, but not as an instrument of an activist identity development. Activism is conceived in a person's mind informed by the social predicaments of a society at a given time. The empirical evidences from this study as discussed in the findings section implied that it was the personal experience of students that informed the student activists in their actions of activism as undergraduates on campus. Only people could conceive revolutionary ideas, not technologies. But technology had become a more powerful organizing medium and a tool in fueling activist campaigns with a wider outreach potential. It is the face-to-face organizing paradigm that has shifted to the largescale utilization of the cyber technology to mobilize support for a social justice activism. Yet, a personally identifiable social connection remained the core of the traditional activist identity formation

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Reflections

Generally, human beings learn the inner working dynamics of society's mode of operation through the process of socialization by participating in the social system of their surroundings (Goslin, 1969; Wrong, 1961). Children learn patterns of behavior and grow into the system of thinking around their immediate social milieus during their school age (Goslin, 1969). These milieus are mostly composed of parental connections as well as close family relationships. Learning through historical accounts of events begins in some cases from the early years of a child's development through storytelling. As part of child development and learning, these processes of knowledge creation constitute the early beginnings of the dynamics of knowing.

The literature review section of this study re-affirmed the assertion that college campuses serve undergraduate college students as a platform of politicizing and organizing for social justice (Biddix, 2014; Crossley, 2008; Van Dyke, 1998). According to the attestation of the participants of this study, undergraduate students arrived on campus with varying orientations about race relations, racism, and class attributes in the society. Some had preliminary information from their parents, family members, or the community while others were first confronted with this very idea of social justice when intermingling with their peers on campus. College campus was, therefore, a point of convergence for students who had similar ideals or likeminded goals to organize and rally around different social causes. Jeremy's reply to the research question, for example, reaffirmed the fact that students used college campuses as a platform for organizing rallies to protest injustices perpetrated against community members by state authorities such as community policing and the overall justice system which was perceived as unjust. College students who were also working as community organizers akin to Jeremy's

stated role of working with grassroot level organizing were typical instances of student activists this study is illuminating in a phenomenological analysis.

Undergraduate students whose predisposition to issues of social justice was fresh on their minds, had the highest probability of being attracted to contemporary movements such as the BLM. Even others who had less or no information before they went to college deemed it necessary to participate either as a forefront organizer or as an ally while stressing the opportunity college campuses had afforded them to be part of the student organized rallies. Almost all the participants attested to the convenience campus had provided them to intermingle with their peers. In summary, participants rectified how important college campuses were in this regard. As a result, campus grounds appeared to be the most conducive platforms for organizing and getting connected with likeminded students mainly for undergraduates as soon as they landed on higher education premises.

The findings concluded undergraduate college students intellectually evolved in their involvement in social justice leadership as part of student moral development. That aspect of student development would also constitute the core values of the responsibilities to be bestowed upon students in their respective communities as leaders in social justice after graduating from college. The process constitutes the continuum of reproducing a morally responsible leader as embedded in the universal mission and vision of higher education. In the process of organizing on campus, college students had to face different adversities as part of challenges in their intellectual development in leadership. College administration, student affairs and faculty reacted to student rallies on campus in different ways.

Particularly for students of African American descent, student activism was transpired by personal experiences or motivations to protest or rally around a certain social issue in and outside

of the college campus (Gibson & Williams, 2020). The African American student participants reiterated that they were mainly informed of the prevalence of racial injustices from family members and other sources in the community even before joining college. Such practices, according to some of the interviewees, were particularly embedded in the upbringing of students of African American origin.

In fact, it must be noted that modern cyber communication and social media as a new agent or informant has revolutionized the social movements in general and student organizing on campus in particular (Eric, 2013). The student activism in this study revolved around demanding change in the sphere of racial justice as an element of the overall social justice movement. Yet, the legacy of student activism and the contemporary mobilization of undergraduate student rallies around higher education had presupposed the historical experiences of social movements in and around the world (Brown, 2016; Isaac et al., 2020).

The participants, somehow, referenced to the historical injustices as a source of their knowledge or a mechanism of informing themselves through the empirically and theoretically chronicled terrains of social movements (Isaac, et al, 2020). Student activists reflected on this awareness as an embodiment of the learning process undergraduate students had gone through the formal classroom setting in learning about the Civil Rights history, for example, and other hands-on storytelling experiences either through parents or community informants.

Some participants stressed the need for getting involved as a result of their inquisitive mind that translated into personal development as a student. Lauren, for instance, stressed the conviction that she wanted to be involved because she wanted to be a better ally that translated into being a better person. As an ally activist, Lauren, was not directly affected by the denigrating experiences of policing the same way her Black peers had to go through. but she had

persuaded herself about the imperative for fighting against such practices of racial injustice. This could be viewed as an intellectual maturity that a college student acquires, eventually, evolving as a leader in social justice.

Student personal development also involved building confidence and trying to do things that normatively seemed right in the society. The very idea of developing a consciousness of doing the right thing was a form of informing oneself about what is wright and what is wrong. Participants reflected on what they have learned and how they have grown through their activist experiences they discussed in the interviews. These sorts of experiences they talked through were delegated to the inner experiences of self-awareness and self-confidence built through getting involved in communal matters.

While concluding the question of how undergraduate college students got informed about the social justice topics they were involved either as a protester, as a demonstrator, as an organizer or as a leader in student activism, one could deduce that being undergraduate could be equated with being in a state of curiosity and readiness to absorb information flowing in & around the person's social milieu. This forms the underlying basis of intellectual curiosity whereby learning could take place through getting involved, through formal classroom interaction, and eventually through research. This represents a curve in a student's personal development as a continuum of child development and learning dynamics.

Jeremy summarized the moral imperative aspects for getting involved in activism and how it shaped his personal development & learning through action. He indicated that he was very much interested in getting involved in the idea of promoting social change through his activism and research. Jeremy talked about Paulo Freire's method of social change in his words as he ascribed it to be the fundamental ideology of all social movements whose end goal was to

effectuate social change through the conscious of knowing (Freire, 2005). It is the inquisitive mind that seeks information and at the same time charts the epistemology that informs the learning mind.

The central idea of the study was to reflect on the research question posed to undergraduate college students regarding the phenomenological processes of what informed their social justice activism and what experiences the student activists had garnered in that process of civic engagement. College students' civic engagement in extra-curricular activities on campus constituted the hallmark of student personal development dynamics and prepared the graduates for the roles they assumed as community leaders in their lives that followed their college tenure. Education for social justice is considered an act of cultivating leaders who would change the inequitable social relations by creating a just society (Bell, 1997; Hytten & Bettez. 2011). Such cultivation would start from the student's cumulative knowledge earned in the process of interacting with their social milieu's early in life, while reaching a climax in awareness as students on higher education premises.

The politicizing potentials of college campuses for undergraduate students and the subsequent desire for organizing has remained a tenacious phenomenon throughout the history of higher education. Hence, understanding and guiding undergraduate students throughout their college years is of the essence, mainly for college administration, student affairs, and faculty. This is an important topic in higher education and understanding the behavioral, cognitive process and activities of college students as paraphrased in the topic of this study would find more explanation through this undertaking.

The research question was framed around a contemporary and most recent event highlighting a racial justice movement in a temporally & spatially structured phenomenological

case study. Even though social justice denoted the overall fairness in terms of equal rights and opportunities for all, racial justice has been predominantly featured in this study without discounting the equally important components of social justice such as environmental justice, labor justice, justice in the field of gender equality and some more.

The race predicament has taken precedence in this study due to its historically long tradition of the unequal race relations in America as well as due to the very example set by the Civil Rights era movement echoing relevance to the most recent BLM movement as a case in point. Racial inequality could also be a manifestation of economic inequality, unequal access to resources such as education, status, and privilege. Therefore, racial justice rallies or movements that attracted undergraduate college student activists would be very instrumental in exploring the investigative question of what informed college student activism for social justice as a wholistic concept of justice. There were a series of historical evidences explaining the centuries long tradition of college campuses as platforms for student organizing, protests, rallies, and demonstrations that constituted the overarching concept of student movements as a continuum, ever since the inception of higher education institutions in the country.

As time went on, the nature & scope of student organizing might have changed because the nature of social issues around which college students rallied seemed to have also evolved but the anatomy of organizing on campus for the purpose of demanding change had remained an integral part of higher education and college student activism. Therefore, this study, concurrently, attempted to explore the evolution of student movements on college campuses, how organizing and agenda setting changed through time thereby attempting to employ theoretical approaches that could explain the motifs for student activism in social justice leadership. As a result, the critical understanding of the findings in this study would contribute to

nurturing a more valuable knowledge for leadership in higher education. The purpose of higher education that it was, remained to educate morally & ethically responsible leaders, as also rooted in the mission & vision of the institution I was affiliated with while doing this study. Participants of the research interview for this study were undergraduate college students randomly selected by mere criteria of being an undergraduate student in either one of the Universities, public or private, in a midwestern state.

Empirical Knowledge

Besides the historical records or theoretical arguments around racial justice, college students revealed empirical sources at their disposal as the basis for their Knowing of the imbalanced race relations in American society. The Findings in this study indicated parental sources, history lessons and peer reporting as some of the mediums that informed student activism for social justice. The personal experiences that students lived through by observing the various incidents of racial profiling, discriminations, and violence against Black citizens by the law enforcement constituted the core of the student activists' empirical knowledge pertaining to racial injustice. The contemporary grass root national network of racial justice activists with local actors, the BLM movement, was built on such empirical evidences of violence by the law enforcement.

Among those major racial incidents during the last seven to eight years were, for instance, the shooting death of a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in Florida, Eric garner in New York, Michael Brown in Missouri and Philando Castile in Minnesota. The most recent and most viral of an internationally acclaimed incident occurred on May 25, 2020 when a Minneapolis police officer chocked an African American Man, George Floyd, to death, thereby, featuring the "I can't breathe" phrase as a movement in and by itself (Gabriel, 2020). While such live

experiences could ignite social justice activism to its highest level, undergraduate college students residing on campuses also endured micro-aggressions manifested through racial slurs written on walls & walkways of student residences, classrooms, rest rooms and other communal spaces shared by the college community. These examples constituted the bedrock of college students' firsthand empirical knowledge that would sustain student activism as a necessity for survival if the system of racial disparity is going to last as well. And, with the prevalence of injustices in the society, therefore, student activism would remain an unfinished edifice.

Furthermore, historical narratives and storytelling that college students absorbed during their pre-college or after landing on college campuses during their formative years were substantiated through such empirical evidences reminiscent of the incidents stated above (Crotty, 1998). It was the cumulative of these knowledge sources that informed the student activists moral imperatives to act in defense of justice when a group of likeminded undergraduates converged on campus. The focal point of this statement or claim was just to reiterate the fact that student activism as a phenomenon was induced by the act of learning or Knowing as a process of creating knowledge. In other words, it is the learned mind that inquiries about the state of things and that gets engaged in the actions of transforming. Undergraduate college students are prone to such inquisitive state of being mainly because traditional undergraduate students fall within curious minded young age group, and secondly because of the nature of college education that is based on questioning why things are the way they are. Learning is an interactive process which is also the essence of an epistemological discourse in college.

History Matters

Learning from history contributed to recounting what has happened to the society in the past and how the contemporary society has experienced the unfolding events of that historical

occurrence. Experiential learning, therefore, could be obtained not only from what one currently lives through but also from what has happened in the past and how it shaped the present. Most of the historical events we are learning today have been the subject of the daily news at the time of their happening. Similarly, what we read as a breaking news today will be taught as part of history in the distant future. Student activism of today is a continuum of the historic student movements of the past and some of today's activist engagements were informed by the historical synthesis of the past experiences.

This study addressed college student activism in the context of racial justice. But I must reiterate that there were many other subjects around which student activists organized on campus to demand change for issues with unjust situation. In my literature review, I was able to explore many of such issues ranging from environmental justice, issues of free & fair trade, justice in labor relations, and gender inequality around which undergraduate student activists rallied, to name the few. In this study, racial justice happened to be the major subject that was very much popular during and after the Civil Rights era that profoundly articulated the issue of race relations for the first time in history.

My choice of student activism as the topic of this study emanated from my inspiration of historical accounts around student movements, protest rallies, demonstrations and revolutionary ideals that took place around the world. There were many student-led movements that effected regime changes in some parts of the world ascribing to the politicizing effects of college campuses and the resultant actions of student organizing for change. Almost, all the participants of this study pinpointed to the history of Civil Rights movement as a point of reference for invoking their activist mindset to engage in racial justice activism of the BLM movement today. Student protests in the early years of the establishment of higher education institutions were

limited in scope and reach out. The students of the early era of the higher education inceptions protested the bad living conditions on campus or the unfair policies of the college administration. The scope was not as a wide-ranging issue that went beyond the college campus as it is today, and the reach out was limited to the very campus where such issue arise and activism was conceived to counter-act the issue.

Student activism, conceptually, coalesced with the emergence of higher education institutions to the extent that both signified an inseparable binary of the unity of opposites. The history of higher education institutions in the United States and college student activism were so intertwined. A series of peer reviewed research publications and textbooks attested to the historical significance of student movements going as far back as centuries. Because history mattered a great deal, student activists of today were also inspired by the historical accounts of such movements translated into experiential learning for the recent movements.

It must be noted that the earliest models of the student rebellion as it was called at time occurred in 1863 at Harvard to protest the behavior of the master (Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). Another notable student protest was recorded more than a century later at Harvard in 1776, again, protesting the bad dining & living condition, even, rendering the name ‘Bad Butter Rebellion” to the movement (Ellsworth & Burns). Student rebellions, protests and movements continued with evolving causes ranging from student living conditions, campus management, religious freedom, and an array of socio-economic and political causes throughout the subsequent centuries to this date. In the 19th century, for example, dissatisfaction regarding religious freedom, the concept of liberty and anti-slavery sentiments espousing the ideals of abolitionist movements were among the few of the social causes that inspired college students to dissent or protest (Ellsworth & Burns, 1997; Rudolph, 1990).

Ultimately, the corner stone of the iconic experiences for the present-day student activism up to and including the case of the BLM movement cited as a case in this study was laid down by events with the beginning of the 20th century. Among the various factors that contributed to the exemplary transformative experiences were the changes in the socio-economic dynamics of the emerging industrial society, the rise of profit seeking larger universities with increase in student enrollment and ultimately, the new social order following the end of WW II that also rendered an international dimension to student movements worldwide (Broadhurst, 2014; Ellsworth & Burns, 2009). But it was not until the beginning of the second half of the 20th century that the most appealing points of reference to contemporary student activist phenomenon came into existence, i.e., protesting the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement (Ahmad, 1978).

The Civil Rights movement that explicitly articulated racial justice for the first time had become a landmark for the student activists of today to whose experiences they had subscribed and from which today's student activists attempted to draw meaning for their current actions. Hence, history mattered to experiential learners for making meaning out of their current endeavors while synthesizing past experiences of likeminded actors.

The Essence of Knowing

Not Withstanding the epistemological notion of questioning how one knows what he or she knows, the essence of Knowing in this context was to connect intellectual Knowing with the objectivity of the real human experiences. Social justice activism is a reaction to a prevalence of social disequilibrium resulting from an oppressive social relationship. It is the cognitive judgement of the student activists' Knowing that leads to construct meaning out of the social imbalance as being oppressive and act to change it (Strange, 2004). Human beings progress through cognitive developmental processes structured throughout their lifetimes. Undergraduate

College student development was correctly described by their intellectual Knowing, whereby, that intellect was shaped through cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1971).

As described in the theory of social movements (Isaac, et. Al., 2020), such movements were conceived by the learned and committed members of the society. Knowing is the cumulative outcome of cognitive perspective through learning that college education was also designed for. The study of college student activism cannot be viewed separately from the knowledge seeking goal of college education and the curriculum. Rogers (2012), for example, described how Black College students demanded the inclusion of Black study courses into the college curriculum as a way of diversifying higher education. There were a series of cognitive processes by college students to get to the point of demanding a diversified curriculum as a means of maximizing the different sources of Knowing.

Furthermore, Intellectual and cognitive development was instrumental in inquiring the state of things in the society and Knowing what is going out there would result into an action of some sort. In the context of college student's Knowing, student activism was the result of the Knowing that the student activist would use as an instrument of making an informed decision for their actions. To be precise, the Knowing I am describing here could be understood in its conventionally equivalent term called Knowledge. Though, knowledge could be acquired through formal or informal processes of experience or education, the Knowing as an epistemological discourse is, exceptionally, attributed to the intellectual development earned through education. That is why I am emphasizing on college education as the domain of Knowing whose chain effect would incorporate social activism by the college educated social justice activists. It is important for higher education professionals to be cognizant of the fact that

educating the morally & ethically responsible future leaders would include an act of dissenting as part of the student's development process mostly manifested through college student activism.

Motifs

Social justice activism is viewed as a progressive action undertaken by an individual or group of volunteers who would commit to bring about a positive change (Fingerhut & Hardy, 2020). But there are some underlying motivations for such volunteerism that could lead to a lifetime commitment to a movement for social justice. According to the stated descriptions from the interview of participants in this study, students had been driven by various persuasions about what is unjust in the society. Some cited moral reasons, others described the historical wounds inflicted up on their ancestors as well as their own contemporaries including the dissenting students themselves, and the belief in the necessity for liberation ideology to induce the course of activism as a way forward.

The moral imperative for supporting a just cause has emerged as a universal value orientation for the most part of the student activists because the righteousness of morality was viewed in terms of serving the cause of social justice. Morality also had a developmental aspect for college students in the process of their intellectual growth. Student social activism was shaped through such moral values and cognitive or intellectual development. Participants of student activism reflected on the lessons learned by being part of the student activist rallies in various forms. This implied that undergraduate students would find the imperative for organizing on campus to rally around demands for racial justice and to create an equitable environment in all spheres of societal life to be a morally justifiable social action.

The second motif for activism hinted to the fact that college students were able to become very much cognizant of the unfair treatment of racial minorities to be morally unacceptable.

Because the segregation they had to endure was embedded in the overall superstructure of the State's ideological foundation based on inequality. Therefore, the need to revolt or protest the very establishment that fostered such inequality would come as natural reaction for the oppressed. So, college campuses appeared to be the best platform for the like-minded young learners to advance the causes of promoting justice by organizing as students. Subsequently, the emergence of distinct student organizations around different subjects of their choices became a natural consequence of each student's level of consciousness around morality as well. The Moral Development Theory described by Kohlberg (1971, 1977) indicated the cognitive inquiry of what is unjust to have been rooted in the morality of human consciousness for action.

This study addressed college student activism mainly in the sphere of racial justice. This did not mean that racial justice was the only subject around which student activists organized on campus to demand change for issues with unjust state of affairs. Race relations in America, I would say, remained the predominantly engaging branch of social justice activism that also embraced moral guidance as a motive for acting to remedy the prevailing inequality. College student activism and organizing on campus could remain the major phenomenon on college campuses for as much as one could predict future trends. To be cognizant of such possible motifs that would drive college students on campuses could serve the strategic preparedness for higher education professionals of all levels.

Solidarity and Common Cause

Social movements attracted people of similar ideological persuasions and activists who claim to espouse common cause. Such solidarity and common cause in student activist protests and rallies were reflected in the context of allyship with an emphasis around racial justice. People of different racial origin or different socio-economic statuses could have an ideological

commonality of valuing equal treatment as their common value to fight for. In the context of a binary of the privileged vs the disadvantaged, the first category would show solidarity for the second group in the fight for equity and equality when the privileged group values equality the same way the disadvantaged group does. This has been the case in racial justice movements of the 1960s and later in which Whites rallied alongside Black citizens for racial equality (Orum, 1970). This was the type of solidarity that came to be known as ally activism in the framework of undergraduate college student activist rallies.

Higher education has become the confluence for undergraduate college students of different races but brought some with common beliefs together to rally for a common cause. Student activism for racial justice has re-affirmed time and again that White undergraduate college students also shared the causes of their Black peers and stood in solidarity in the fight for equal rights for Blacks as ally activists. The findings in this study has also, justifiably, concluded in both the literature review sources and from the interviews of the participants in the study that White ally activist students contributed to the contemporary BLM movement founded by Black activists.

Students of African American origin may be majority in terms of participation in racial justice organizing. This could be due to the fact the BLM movement was centered around racial justice that attracted the African American members of the community including student activists of color. Yet, there were students of other racial category who had shown willingness to participate in the movement as well. This could explain the very essence of allyship or what we call ally activism in the context of subject matters or issues with such divides as race, gender and/or class. Barnhardt (2012) defines ally activism as a strategic act of advocacy by an individual or a group that aligns with and supports a cause with another individual or group of

people that they are not, normally, a member of. An example of such allyship or solidarity around common causes as explained in many instances, would be when Whites rally around causes demanding justice for Blacks to be treated equally before the law.

The interviewees of this study also revealed that they had garnered valuable experiences from their allyship in participating around the BLM movement on campus as well as off-campus. They, further, expressed interest in advancing their career in social justice leadership while, concurrently, pursuing research in racial justice as the domain of their continued growth in scholarship. The intersectionality of some identities, even within different racial identities, might have contributed to the advancement of solidarity among college student activists due to the common causes forged by such intersectionality and the common social predicaments of the group. I would argue that given the ever-growing opportunities of communication and chances of aligning common interests in the forms of solidarity or allyship, organizing on campus and student activism will remain a phenomenon that higher education institutions need to cope up with for the foreseeable future.

The study participants' expression of vested interest in this field implied that the students' civic engagements during their undergraduate years contributed to the students' over all cognitive and intellectual development that evolved through time. This, in other words, implied how desirable such multicultural or multi-racial civic engagement in different forms including student activism should be part of an experiential learning that needed to be nurtured for the overall college student development and learning.

Limitations

By choosing BLM as a case in point, my study was limited to the subject of racial justice as a phenomenon among others. Yet, it was not discussed as an isolated process which led to the

inquiry of social movements as the underlying precursors for the undergraduate student activist movements. Then, the theoretical approaches used to explain student activism as an integral part of social movement as well as the findings thereafter might have sounded too theoretical. It was not the scope of this study to interrogate critical theory in the context of the post-Marxist ideological debate around alienation of labor as the source of all evils. For the purpose this study, I would like to note that critical theory must only be understood in terms the human condition in general.

The intersectionality of identity among others was equally appealing to the idea of student identity development (Jones & McEwen, 2000) acquired through student activism. Even though there were several intersecting identities between the privileged and marginalized groups of actors in this study, the study focused more on the racial factor that triggered racial justice activism. Further research around more diversified topics in social justice that also involved student activists such as the occupy movements or the MeToo movements could yield new findings and approaches for understanding motifs that informed undergraduate student activists for action.

Recognizing such limitations is of paramount importance for further considerations of studying each topic in social justice as a distinct issue of its own. I, also, have to admit that due to the public health emergency provision that limited personal contacts during the time I have been conducting the research interviews for this study, I was unable to incorporate a larger pool of student participants to maximize the richness of my data.

Another limitation was the very small proportion of Black students in the predominantly White private universities from which I recruited most of the participants. Faith, who was an African American woman participant, clearly indicated how predominantly White her campus

was when she met with a group of undergraduate fellow students in a book club to exchange their views of community policing. Additionally, I observed some tension around my choice of Black Lives Matter as a topic for study around the argument that why should only Black lives matter. Explaining or justifying the controversy between the Black Lives matter vs All Lives matter lines of conventional argument was not the scope of this study. But I suspect that the controversy or the tensions around these arguments might have contributed to the limited number of participants to volunteer for the interviews in this study.

Recommendations

This study of college students' civic engagement is a more generalized concept. An empirical analysis of racial justice has proven time and again that student activism around race relation needs further study in the future. Additionally, student activism must be explored by discerning topics that are categorized within the social justice concept. Activism around racial justice, environmental justice, gender equality, or any other topic in the arena of social justice must be addressed distinctively. Findings should be explained in terms of their relevance in practical aspects of the society's functional structure. The findings of this study, for example, have practical application for parents, educators, higher education institutions, school districts, and policy makers at all levels. Dissenting as a way of development (Biddix, 2014) comes as a natural process that young undergraduate students would go through during their college encounters on campus. Educators and administrators of higher education institutions need to be cognizant of these dynamics as part of college student development and learning leadership.

Civic Engagement as a Dynamic Process for College Student Development

As an alternative to a direct political engagement framed in the context of traditional party politics, student civic engagement on campus served as a springboard for the rise of future

leaders from the present day's young undergraduate college students. It is important for higher educational administrators, professionals, and researchers to adopt curriculum that would address a more peaceful way of organizing on campus as well as methods of harmonious social mobilization within the off-campus community by undergraduate college student activists. As I have noticed in the series of the literature reviews, the level of violence in the process of college student activism had decreased from what it had been in the 60s or 70s compared to how relatively peaceful organizing on campus and marching through public places or the community has become (Crossley, 2008). A more robust curricular offering as either electives or mandatory courses would transform the students' social responsibility in the arena of the leadership role they would assume in the society. It is important to chart curriculums that could promote civility in student civic engagement to the point that student activism could foster positive moral development of future leaders in social justice.

Improved Race-Relations and Multiculturalism promoted through Extra-Curricular Discourses

The differing views about contemporary race-relations in America and the historical terrains of racial justice movements to this date implied that a continued student activism around racial justice will be eminent in the foreseeable future. Ally activism is also gaining more momentum as expressed by the participants who identified themselves as privileged when responding to the research questions of this study. An integrated curriculum around racial and ethnic studies would benefit an improved race-relations and an atmosphere of cooperation among undergraduate college students. Microaggressions and racial slurs on campuses would decrease if focused courses and extra-curricular activities that foster multiculturalism could be offered on college campuses.

In fact, equity and equality of opportunities as the domains of social justice are not limited to racial disparity. Therefore, extracurricular activities and common courses need to be designed to encourage student engagement for an all-rounded personality development. I believe new movements in the context of the changing paradigm in organizing would offer a new perspective on future research around college student activism that social justice leaders and educators alike should consider. Because I have identified the BLM movement as a case in point, I used the phenomenological case study as a methodological approach. But after going through the methodology, literature review, theories, and findings, I have come to conclude that undergraduate college student activism could also be studied by employing empirical and historical case study methods more eloquently.

Conclusion

The study of college student civic engagement is in part a reflection of the historical terrain that higher education institutions in the United States went through. It is a continuous process that evolved through time in terms of the dynamics of social justice issues that students revolted against and the way undergraduate college students organized a movement around a cause. The human experience college student activists garnered through their civic engagement on college campuses constituted the core of student experiential learning and student development. The literature review, interview of participants I have conducted, and the theoretical approaches employed in this study unearthed the rich potential the study of undergraduate college student activism could offer for further research.

Furthermore, this study is an attempt to contribute more knowledge to the inherent characteristics of college learning experience so that higher education professionals ranging from administrators, student affairs, and faculty could adjust to the challenges and meet the demands

of their times as educators. Civic engagement is enriched by extra-curricular activities offered on college campuses. A learned mind is an enabler for making an informed decision to act or to become an activist. Hence, Education for social justice must incorporate curricular elements of the human learning experience for the advancement of the common good.

Epilogue

At the time I was wrapping up this study for defense, two monumental racial justice incidents of historic proportion rocked America and the whole world. A 20 year-old African American man, Daunte Wright, was shot to death on April 11, 2021 by a police officer in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota during a routine traffic stop (McFadden, 2021). The shooting sent a shockwave throughout the community and beyond mainly because of an already tense situation as a result of the ongoing trial of a former Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, in the death of George Floyd.

Derek Chauvin was pronounced guilty by the presiding Judge on April 21, 2021 on all three counts in the murder of George Floyd, days after the shooting death of Mr. Wright (NYT, 2021). These two incidents took place some 10 miles away from each other. The historic significance of Chauvin's verdict has signaled an unprecedented outcome in the adjudication of racial justice crimes in the American legal system's court proceedings for the first time in history. Yet, the paradox between continuity and change in America's racial justice practices seemed to remain a vicious circle simply because the celebratory mood expected of a semblance of justice in the case of Chauvin's verdict was marred by the loss of a precious young life a week before within the same community, not even far from each other.

America has gone through a lot of sacrifices to improve the lives of its marginalized citizens, mainly the African American community that was the target of historical injustices for

centuries. The incessant struggle for racial Justice from W. E. B. Du Bois to Martin Luther King Jr. and George Floyd had immensely directed racial justice activists of African American origin with some White allies lending hands to the movement. Admittedly, the historic Derek Chauvin's verdict would not have been possible, had it not been for the tireless advocates of the "I can't breathe" movement almost all year round since the minute George Floyd was pronounced dead on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Chauvin's verdict and Wright's shooting, in my belief, represented hope and despair as well as change and continuity at the same time. While the year-long iconic resolve by activists that resulted into Chauvin's verdict were to represent hope and change, the shooting death of Duante Wright indicated the unfinished journey that would render more voice to the Black Lives Matter Movement to perpetually and rightfully spearhead racial justice activism to the extent of institutionalizing it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: BLM March in Minnesota, July 2016

PROTEST MARCH IN RESPONSE TO THE SHOOTING OF PHILANDO CASTILE, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA ON JULY 7, 2016 (IMAGE: FIBONACCI BLUE)

Appendix B: CITI Certificate:

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Regassa Oljirra (ID: 7890612)
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of St. Thomas - Minnesota (ID: 2848)
- **Institution Email:** olji0975@stthomas.edu
- **Institution Unit:** College of Education
- **Phone:** 612-220-3227

- **Curriculum Group:** Human Subjects Research (HSR)
- **Course Learner Group:** Human Subjects Research Training: Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 30521974
- **Completion Date:** 09-Feb-2019
- **Expiration Date:** 08-Feb-2023
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 86

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	09-Feb-2019	3/3 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	09-Feb-2019	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	09-Feb-2019	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	09-Feb-2019	5/5 (100%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	09-Feb-2019	5/5 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	09-Feb-2019	1/5 (20%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kbc486980-a757-4942-a62f-4b39e240cbb3-30521974

Appendix C: Research Questions

I adopted the following question to conduct my study of college student activism: What were the leading factors for undergraduate college student activists to get involved and participate in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the twin cities? I developed sub-questions to further illuminate the over-arching question informing my study. I use the second person singular "you" when addressing the question to a particular participant in this interview but the analysis and findings from each participant's responses would illuminate the collective behavior of undergraduate college students' behavior as activists or participants of the cause under discussion. The questions were personalized as follows,

1. How did you become informed about the BLM movement?
2. What motivated you to participate in some aspect of activism beyond "bystander" participation?
3. How did you participate in the movement? What types of roles did you assume in the BLM movement rallies?
4. How did you engage with your peers from campus and with community organizers during the BLM movement?
5. What was the reaction from the college administration or student affairs during the students' participation in the BLM rallies?
6. How did college students use campus grounds for their activism in the BLM movement and what was the reaction of the college community?
7. Do you believe that you are an activist around the BLM cause?
8. How did you hear about the shooting death of Philando Castille by a police officer on July 16, 2016 in Falcon Heights, Minnesota?

Appendix D: A Sample Manual Data Coding